

Cuk - 1706115 - 15 - AP 3418

15

76 *new left review*

## THE HUNGARIAN CRUCIBLE

Fredric Jameson

The Postmodernism Debate

Walter D. Mignot

Roads from

John Kershaw

Defining the Nazi State

David Forgacs

Gramsci and the British Left

Kate Soper

Feminism as Critique

Joseph McCarney

The Moment of Althusser

NO. 76 ISSN 0022-3114 (1990)

1		<i>Themes</i>
3	<i>Nigel Swain</i>	Hungary's Socialist Project in Crisis
31	<i>Frederic Jameson</i>	Marxism and Postmodernism
47	<i>Ian Kershaw</i>	The Nazi State: an Exceptional State?
70	<i>David Forgacs</i>	Gramsci and Marxism in Britain
		REVIEWS
91	<i>Kate Soper</i>	Feminism as Critique
115	<i>Joseph McCartney</i>	For and Against Althusser

KP 3418

<i>Editor</i>	Robin Blackburn	
<i>Editorial Committee</i>	Ting Ali, Perry Anderson, Patrick Camiller, Alexander Cockburn, Mike Davis, Peter Dews, Deane Elson, Norman Geras, Quentin Hoare, Oliver MacDonald, Benita Margal, Ellen Meiksins Wood	
<i>Editorial communications</i>	New Left Review, 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR	
<i>Subscriptions correspondence</i>	New Left Review, 120-126 Lavender Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HP	
<i>Business Manager</i>	Robin Gable	
<i>Advertising Manager</i>	Arthur Boyars	
<i>American Distributor</i>	B. de Boer, 113 East Center Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA	
<i>NLR Prices</i>	<i>Individual subscription:</i>	<i>Institutional subscription:</i>
<i>Inland:</i>	£14	£28
<i>Overseas surface:</i>	£18 or US\$28	£33 or US\$50
<i>Airspeed (USA &amp; Canada):</i>	£18 or US\$28 or Can\$38	£33 or US\$50
<i>Overseas airmail:</i>	£25 or US\$41 or Can\$52	£40 or US\$62
<i>Back issues (non-subscribers):</i>	<i>Inland: £4</i>	<i>Overseas: £5.50/US\$7.50</i>
<i>Back issues (subscribers):</i>	<i>Inland: £2.95</i>	<i>Overseas: £3.70/US\$6.00</i>

MICROFICHE SETS 1-172 (1960-1988): £350 or US\$600

INDEX 1-172 (1960-1988). *Cloth:* £27.95 or US\$53 *Paperback:* £12.95 or US\$25

New Left Review (ISSN 0028-6060) is published bi-monthly by New Left Review Ltd, 6 Meard St., London W1V 3HR, UK. Annual subscription price in the USA and Canada is US\$28 for individuals, US\$90 for institutions, including airspeed delivery. Second-class postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. USA POSTMASTER: Send address changes to New Left Review, Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Printed in Great Britain.



It is perhaps only today, in a context of mounting contradictions in Eastern Europe, that we can fully appreciate the severity of the blow dealt to international socialism by the Soviet-led occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. By blocking democratization in a country with one of the oldest and most solid organized workers' movements in the world, the 'normalizers' ensured that socialist forces would be in a weak and compromised position throughout Eastern Europe when Brezhnevite normality finally became impossible to maintain. And yet, socialist renewal remains the only basis on which the problems of the region can be lastingly tackled. Certainly there can be little future along the road of privatization and anarchic marketization that is being urged by the Bush administration. Economic planning, including at the crucial level of intra-Comecon and East-West relations, offers a real chance of regulating the operation of market forces and achieving a productive integration with the world economy that does not result in large-scale unemployment and massive social dislocation. But in the newly opening space of political democracy, such a course will start with no prior guarantees and will have to prove its superiority in the free clash of ideas and programmes.

In this issue Nigel Swain provides a highly informative survey of the political arena in contemporary Hungary which, as in the development of market reforms in the sixties and seventies, appears as a laboratory of change in the Eastern bloc. After the trauma of the military suppression of the 1956 revolution, the Kadar regime later developed an original combination of economic reform and political integration that assured it a period of genuine, though varied, popular support. By the time of Kadar's removal as Party secretary, however, his attempt to conciliate disparate forces in the Party and society had run out of steam, against a background of soaring external debt and unsustainable trade balances. An informal coalition of reform economists and democratic oppositionists then found increasingly vocal expression in sections of the Party and state apparatus, opening up to debate the whole direction of the political system. Written in June of this year, after a period spent living in Hungary, Swain's account paints a vivid picture of a fast-moving

political crisis, and of the ideas that have developed within and outside the Communist movement to address it.

The character of the Nazi state, and of Hitler's role within it, has always posed a particular problem for historical explanation. While static liberal theories of totalitarianism have manifestly failed to probe beneath the surface of political form, or even to account for the structural complexity of the Third Reich, a simplistic economic determinism is unable to grasp the relative autonomy of the movement that culminated in the extermination camps and the plunge into dementia. Critically drawing on alternative traditions of analysis, Ian Kershaw forcefully argues that the Nazi period can only be understood in terms of a shifting relationship between big capital, the state and party and the person of Hitler himself.

Fredric Jameson's article in *NLR* 146, identifying postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, has given rise to wide-ranging debate over the past five years. In reply to fourteen critics and commentators, reprinted from a forthcoming *Maisonneuve* collection, Jameson continues the attempt to analyse the systemic coherence of a social and cultural phenomenon that spurns any totalizing ambition.

Articles by David Forgacs and Joseph McCarney consider the impact of two central figures in Western Marxism on the thinking of the Left. Forgacs traces the influence of Gramsci in Britain, where divergent interpretations of his work have helped to shape much strategic theory since 1968. McCarney, in a review of Gregory Elliott's authoritative 'Althusser: the Detour of Theory' (Verso, 1987), examines the conjunctural resonance and theoretical claims of the French Marxist's writings of the sixties and seventies.

Finally, Kate Soper assesses 'Feminism as Critique' (Polity, 1987), a collection edited by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell which seeks to integrate the contribution of Habermas into a reconstruction of social theory. While sympathetic to this move beyond the 'deconstructive' phase of feminism, Soper is keenly aware of the remaining tensions and ambiguities within the project.

Nigel Swain

## *Hungary's Socialist Project in Crisis*

By the early summer of 1989 Hungary had become a *de facto* multi-party system, albeit still within a one-party structure.<sup>1</sup> Numerous political forces operated openly, experiencing minimal official harassment, with meaningful if unequal access to the media. Virtually all significant actors, including the reform wing of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP),<sup>2</sup> agreed that the forthcoming elections would be fought with no built-in majority for any party, and that the HSWP should enjoy no privileged status in parliament or any other sphere of social or economic life. All advocated reforms in education and the social services which would offer new possibilities for private initiative. All averred that Hungary's economic future lay in a 'mixed economy', with a large private sector, in which competing insurance companies would play a significant role, in which there would be extensive foreign participation, and in which links with the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) would be weakened, while those with the European Community (Common Market) strengthened.

In other words, all significant political actors envisaged a socio-economic future for Hungary which is the very antithesis of what most, in both East and West, regard as socialist.<sup>3</sup> Why is this? What has happened? The standard account runs somewhat as follows. Hungary introduced 'market socialism' in 1968. Its foreign debt has grown constantly ever since, and has become the biggest per capita debt in Eastern Europe. Living standards have stagnated, if not fallen. The economic crisis is now so acute it requires political as well as economic reform. The HSWP has finally accepted the bankruptcy of the socialist economic project and is offering both to share the burden of power, by introducing a multi-party system, and to create an open market economy.

This account is not inaccurate, as far as it goes. But it leaves all the important questions unposed. Readers of *New Left Review* are unlikely to be impressed by an account which suggests a necessary contradiction between political democracy and socialism, still less by its converse that political democracy and market economies necessarily go together. Yet, superficially, this is a possible interpretation of Hungarian events, and one that will be the most attractive to the political Right. In order to progress beyond it and understand the significance of Hungarian demands for political pluralism, the restoration of 'civil society' and a 'mixed economy', a deeper examination of Hungary's socialist model and its current crisis is required. What sort of 'market socialism' was introduced in 1968? When did the foreign debt get so large? Why? Where have the new political parties come from? Why was the self-management model of 1985 abandoned so quickly in favour of limited liability companies, a stock market and 'external' ownership of state assets? How will state assets be re-privatized? Who will buy? By focusing on the detail of how the current situation has developed, this article will attempt two things. First, it will suggest that, while the assumption of automatic incompatibility between political democracy and socialism is facile, the economic crisis which Hungary's socialism underwent resulted in a

<sup>1</sup> My main sources in the writing of the article have been: the periodicals *Figyelő* (an economic weekly), *Heti Világgazdaság* (a weekly news magazine with an economic slant), and *Magyar Nemzet* (the daily of the Patriotic People's Front with a deserved reputation for independence); such party programmes as were available in May 1989; and discussions with at least one representative of each of the major new political groups. These sources were supplemented by three books published in 1988–89. S. Kurtán, ed., *Magyarország Politikai Évkönyve* 1988, Budapest 1989; K. Borátfányi, *Szóláspróba*, Budapest 1989; and Z. Ács, *Kizárt a párt*, Budapest 1988. The first is a political yearbook for 1988, the other two contain interviews with central political figures. For reasons of space references have been kept to a minimum. The phrase 'socialist project' is used in the title to side-step the irresolvable debate about whether Eastern Europe is or is not socialist in any 'true' sense, yet to assert that those who created the Hungary of the past four decades saw themselves as socialist, and, at the outset, strove to implement some policies that radical socialists in the West agree to be necessary prerequisites for socialism.

<sup>2</sup> The position of the HSWP is not clear cut as there is no longer a single party view.

<sup>3</sup> As the discussion below suggests, the Ferenc Münnich Society, which is the only group advocating a return to a more traditional model, need not be considered significant. The Left-Wing Alternative Association, which hardly qualifies as significant either, accepts the need for a more open economy despite favouring self-government and workers' control.

structural requirement for some form of effective political pluralism, and multi-party politics is its traditional vehicle. Second, the article will endeavour to demonstrate how Hungary's abandonment of classical socialist, certainly Marxist, economic ambitions via first 'market socialism' and now a fully-fledged market economy was a reasoned response by individuals of socialist persuasion to pressing problems inherent in the economic model. It was not the ideology of a bourgeoisie rampant. That is to say, Hungary's current crisis can be located within a socialist problematic. But in order to do this, we need to have a clear picture of what has happened, why it has happened, and what is likely to happen next. Here, speculation as to what this might mean for socialism will be restricted to some brief concluding remarks.

### Civil Society Reborn

A recurring theme in Hungarian political writing of the 1980s, both 'dissident' and openly published, was the decline of 'civil society'. Between approximately 1948 and 1951, it was argued, Hungary, together with other Eastern European societies, lost all forms of social organization that were not connected, directly or indirectly, to the Party. Associations of all kinds were banned, as politics, and the single omnipotent ruling party, invaded all spheres of social life. Non-party, social life—'civil society'—disappeared, only to re-emerge in a greatly restricted form in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

As a term of political analysis 'civil society' was never particularly precise, covering anything that was not the Party and its politics.<sup>5</sup> But whatever its precise meaning, openness, the rule of law, and the presence of independent organizations and parties were central components, and in this sense it would seem to have returned. Political developments have gone far beyond breathless wonderment at what is allowed, at what the monolithic Party machine sanctions or closes its eyes to. Almost everything is allowed. Those who are politically active know that, and, in only a matter of a few months, have come to expect it. What is more, the HSWP is no longer monolithic. As we shall see below, it is both split internally and anxious to shed its special status with regard to the state. This is not to say that the new-found freedoms are constitutionally secure. They are not. Nevertheless, by the early summer of 1989 Hungary had developed a vibrant political culture, in which there were no taboo topics—be it 1956, Hungarian minorities abroad, the choice of national coat-of-arms, the size of management bonuses, the presence of Soviet troops, the compulsory teaching of Russian in schools; in which demonstrations were not only permitted, but had become unexceptional; in which the broadcast media encouraged political debate, and the market for written media had become glutted with three hundred publishers, half-a-dozen new periodicals, and the former *samizdat* freely available; and from whose discourse the word 'comrade' had almost entirely disappeared.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the special 1987 issue of *Beszéds* entitled 'The Social Contract', and B. Hankiss, 'Második Társadalom?', *Valóság*, 1984, No. 11, pp. 25–44.

<sup>5</sup> Hankiss, op. cit.

Constitutionally the picture is contradictory. Some fundamental freedoms, such as those of association and assembly, are now law. Parliament is no longer simply a rubber stamp; it enjoys a new autonomy approaching genuine sovereignty, and pressure groups have begun to exercise their constitutional rights to have MPs recalled.<sup>6</sup> But the HSWP still controls some 75 per cent of parliamentary seats, and only fifty or so members regularly contest government proposals. The 'new right to strike' is not new, and is a double-edged sword. Strikes were never illegal in Hungary, and the first attempt to legislate positively about strike action came thirteen years ago in 1976. The February 1989 legislation, much amended from the original proposal, permits solidarity strikes, but prohibits strikes over issues that are covered in an enterprise's 'collective agreement' with its workforce. Further fundamental laws (such as those governing the media and political parties) have yet to be passed by parliament; and a cloud of uncertainty hangs over the whole of the legislative process because the opposition parties do not regard the present government as legitimate, and demand elections before further constitutional change.

That the new parties do not enjoy *de jure* legal status is of considerably less significance than the fact that only the HSWP is equipped with a party machine. It has representation in every town and almost every village in the country. It has the largest membership, the only full-time staff of any significance, and the most property. All the new parties have to rely on part-time workers, pensioners who can devote themselves full-time to the party or research workers who are masters of their own time and, for short periods at least, able to get away with doing very little. The new groups are beginning to acquire office space, telephones and an administrative staff; the re-founded parties are asking for their old buildings back.

### The New Political Spectrum

But who are these new political actors, and where have they come from? A distinction can be made between the new political organizations which, under one guise or another, were responsible for creating the conditions which allowed the emergence of multi-party politics, and the 'nostalgia' or 'continuation' parties which joined in once the process was under way. The biggest new political actor is the *Hungarian Democratic Forum* (HDF). By May, its membership had increased to 15,000, while 750 delegates attended its first National Convention in March. It still declines to call itself a party, preferring the phrase independent intellectual-political movement, and favours free elections, independent political parties, an independent judiciary and armed forces, local self-government, freedom of the press, participation in the world market, free trade unions, adequate wages for all, proper medical care, help for ethnic minorities, justice for the martyrs of 1956, long-term political neutrality, and a constitution that accepts responsibility and care for all Hungarians throughout the world. Its

---

<sup>6</sup> Ten per cent of the electorate must sign such a petition. MPs recalled in this way are replaced by their deputy, the person who obtained the second highest vote in the original election. If that person is unwilling to take the seat, a bye-election is called.

origins lie in the 'populist' tradition of Hungarian thought, as represented by a group of critical writers in the 1930s, some of whom formed the National Peasant Party after the war. Although it claims not to be a movement of writers, five of its nine founding members were writers or poets, and there is a literary bias to its policies. It is stronger on emotive issues, such as freedom, democracy and nationhood, than on concrete economic programmes, which are tinged with populist 'irrationalities'. It supports a market economy, but the market in land should be restricted to Hungarians. It supports property reform, but a token 20-25 per cent of enterprise shares should be owned by the workforce. It has been accused of anti-semitism, which it denies. There is nothing overtly anti-semitic or racist in its policies, yet the manner in which members defend themselves against the charge is reminiscent of the bluster produced by prominent Labour Party politicians when that party is accused of institutional racism. Its strong sense of national identity does not make it any more nationalistic than the Scottish or Welsh National Parties, yet, as with these parties, nationalism covers a wide spectrum of social and economic policies. It makes a point of not describing itself as 'socialist', on the grounds that the term covers political systems as diverse as Sweden and the Kampuchea of Pol Pot. Its critics question the movement's commitment to democracy, both internally and as a political goal. Its supporters see it as a movement in the national liberal and christian liberal traditions. Its enthusiasm for the Hungarian nation, and concern at the declining birth-rate, make it strongly pro-family and lead some of its members to take a firm anti-abortion stance. Its strength at the local level is patchy, although better than that of the other new actors. Some areas have been active organizing petitions to have their members of parliament recalled, others have achieved little more, so far, than to organize independent celebrations on 15 March, the anniversary of the 1848 revolution which has only recently been declared a national holiday.

The second major new political organization is the *Federation of Free Democrats* (FFD). Although it is often presented as a continuation of the 'urbanized' as opposed to 'populist' tradition in Hungarian thought, it is more appropriate to stress the modernity of the movement. It is a child of the socialist world. Its links are with the Democratic Opposition of the 1970s, with the producers of *samizdat*, with Marxism, and with practical attempts to reform socialist social inequality such as the Poor Support Fund.<sup>7</sup> The leading figures are lapsed Marxists, with a firm commitment to political and economic reform, and a strong social and environmental conscience. The FFD has by far the most elaborated programme of the opposition groups, which is not surprising given the high proportion of economists, sociologists and lawyers in its membership. It is conscious of this intellectual bias and does not expect ever to become a mass party. It is not even particularly upset when other parties steal its policies. It is in favour of a market economy (the details of which will be discussed below), a multi-party system, a free press, free trade unions, local

<sup>7</sup> The Poor Support Fund (SZETA) was an independent organization formed in 1979 to help the poor. It gained legal status in the spring of 1989.

autonomy, a social minimum of welfare provision as a citizen's right, national sovereignty and closer ties with Western Europe. It specifically rejects unilateral withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, although neutrality is seen as a long-term goal. Its critics see it as insufficiently conscious of national identity, and overly intellectual. This is sometimes expressed as being too Jewish.

The remaining new groups are less significant. The *Federation of Young Democrats* (FYD) does not consider itself a party, but may run candidates in forthcoming elections. It is an independent youth group committed to reform. Rather than evolve a full national programme, it engages in issue-based politics, extending to ecology and minority rights as well as issues that concern the young. Its education policy includes the idea that citizens should have the right to a student loan financed by the National Bank. It has played a prominent role in organizing demonstrations and petitions, and is in favour of a market economy and liberal politics. Its Alice Madzsar Women's Group, which is the nearest thing to a women's movement on the political scene, organized the women's demonstration against the Bős-Nagymaros dam in September 1988.

The *Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Fraternal Society* exists to further the values of the person whose name it bears. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was a member of the pre-war Smallholders Party (see below) and resistance organizer who was executed in the last weeks of the war. This wide brief allows the Society to take a stand in support of a host of reform issues and to organize a variety of political events.

The *Left-Wing Alternative Association* comes from a very different political tradition, seeing itself as left-wing in the Western, rather than Eastern European, sense and opposing both capitalist restoration and Stalinism. It is not a political organization in the narrow sense of the term: it does not want to achieve political power, but sees its role as supporting all movements in favour of self-government. Its ultimate goal is the classic Marxist notion of the association of free producers. It does not oppose the multi-party system as such, but it rejects any development that might lead to new bureaucracies, and feels the HSWP might yet be converted into a true Leninist party. Neither does it object to a mixed economy in principle, but demands a much larger social sector than is currently proposed. Its roots lie in a small group of intellectuals in the humanities, although it can claim some working-class support. Its aims are attractive, but it recognizes that they may seem utopian in the present climate and advocates no concrete programme for their achievement. It feels that in ten to fifteen years the need for its type of socialist democracy will be clear.

The *(Leninist) Hungarian Communist Party* is also of the left, but in the Eastern European sense. It condemns 1956 as a counter-revolution, considers a counter-revolutionary situation to have evolved in 1988, and fears 1990 will bring about a bourgeois capitalist restoration. It only exists in the sense that it occasionally sends statements to the media, revealing no details of its membership, or of how it can be contacted.



The *Ferenc Münnich Society*, on the other hand, another defender of the Leninist tradition, is a reality, and is the only political actor of any stature committed unambiguously to restoring the political system prior to May 1988. The name is taken from the politician who, on 1 November 1956, disappeared with Kádár, to return in the wake of the Soviet troops. The society denies it is armed, although the membership comes predominantly from the police, armed forces, and pensioners from these groups. By the end of 1988, its membership was six thousand and growing. In February 1989, it issued a statement opposing the reform wing of the HSWP; but it consistently denies it wants to become a party itself.

Two further new parties should be mentioned, although they are unlikely to be major actors on the political stage: the *Hungarian Radical Party*, which was formed soon after the International Radical Party held its Congress in Budapest in April 1989, and the *Independent Ecology Work Party*, formed at about the same time and based in the small town of Hévíz which is currently experiencing severe environmental problems.

### The 'Nostalgia Parties'

The 'nostalgia' or 'continuation' parties are more numerous, but only three are of significance. The *Social Democratic Party of Hungary* claimed in February 1989 to be operating in 18 Budapest districts and 80 places in the provinces. Its programme is that of a welfare state based on a parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, with free, strong trade unions and a mixed economy. Despite being courted by the Social Democratic parties of Western Europe, the party cannot currently be considered a serious force. It is hopelessly split between an old guard and young pretenders. The former feel their time has finally come after forty years in the wilderness and consider that the young 'don't even know what social democracy is'. The young have a clear view of what a modern social democratic party is like, but have been squeezed out of positions of power. In May, the party's young spokesperson finally resigned saying 'It has to be recognized that a kind of power struggle is taking place between the two sides . . . They cannot see that more is at stake than the struggle for positions.' Inner-party rivalry has taken up so much of the party's time that at an international press conference in April it had no idea how many members it had, issued no statement about how Hungary could get out of its economic crisis, and gave no indication of the conditions under which it might join a coalition. Its critics are suspicious of its historical links with the HSWP (the pre-1956 variant of the HSWP, the Hungarian Workers' Party, was formed out of a merger in 1948 between the Communist Party and the Social Democrats), and the HSWP is currently inclined to talk up the significance of the Social Democrats, its natural coalition partners.

The *Independent Smallholder, Land Labourer and Citizen's Party* (Smallholders Party) suffers from similar problems of schism, although here the divide is not so clearly one of generations. In February it expelled

four members, in March it allowed them back in again, and in April it declared itself to be over its childhood illnesses and preparing for its second National Assembly on 3-4 June. Its current programme is essentially a continuation of its programme of the 1930s: free elections, a multi-party system, freedom of the press, a market economy with special emphasis on small industrialists and traders, a monopoly commission, support for the family (which might develop into an anti-abortion position), free choice of doctors, an environmental policy (a new feature), and political neutrality. It is a classical right-of-centre party.

The final 'nostalgia' party of significance is the *Hungarian People's Party* (HPP), a continuation of the post-war National Peasant Party, which functioned briefly as the Petöfi Party in 1956. It was formed in February 1989 out of the Péter Veres Society, which was itself formed in November 1988 with the intention of working in cooperation with the Patriotic People's Front.<sup>8</sup> It claims a membership of 15-17,000 already, boasts an organization in every county, and plans to have representatives in 1,000 of Hungary's 3,000 localities by the end of 1989. Its policy focuses very much on agricultural and rural issues such as local government reform and a new land law, although not necessarily a new co-operative law; it also calls for national sovereignty, and is a strong supporter of the family. It sees itself as the only party that understands the provincial 'silent majority', and advocates a return of the policies of the 1970s when agriculture was still supported by the government. Its critics view the party with suspicion. It is too closely tied to the Patriotic People's Front, where many National Peasant Party politicians found careers after their party had ceased to function. Others see it as the party of the collective farm presidents.

Other former political parties which have declared themselves operative again but do not yet appear to be serious forces are: the *Independent Hungarian Democratic Party*, the *Christian Democratic People's Party*, the *Hungarian National Christian Democratic Labour Party*, and the *Hungarian Independence Party* which boasts the slogan 'God, the Homeland, Freedom'.

Consideration of Hungary's new political actors must include the Opposition Round Table, which is not an organization at all but a vehicle by which eight of the opposition groupings—Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Fraternal Society; the FYD; the Smallholders Party; the League of Democratic Trade Unions; the HDF; the HPP; the Social Democrats; and the FFD—can develop ground rules for negotiating with the HSWP. It was created on 22 March 1989 in response to a suggestion by the Forum of Independent Lawyers. All the participants agree on two points of principle: that they do not seek a monopoly of power, and that an election should precede further work on the new constitution.

---

<sup>8</sup> The Patriotic People's Front is a movement technically independent of the HSWP whose main constitutional purpose is to organize elections. It also organizes cultural events.

Finally, some of the independent social organizations not primarily involved in politics should be presented. The first independent trade union to be founded, on 16 May 1988, was the Democratic Union of Scientific Workers. Its lead was followed by the Union of Film Artists and Film Employees, the Moving Pictures Democratic Union, 'HUMANITAS', the Democratic Union of Teachers of Mentally Handicapped Children, the Independent Union of Estate Agents and Town Planners, the Independent Union of Ambulance Workers, and the Democratic Union of Teachers. The new unions are predominantly white collar, although a Solidarity Trade Union Workers' Federation exists which is attempting to publish a journal and expresses the fear that intellectuals are solving workers' problems over their heads. The recently formed Democratic Union of Transport Workers, covering white-collar and blue-collar workers, may indicate a growth of working-class interest in independent trade unions. Since 20 December 1988, independent trade unions have enjoyed the support of the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions. They suffer from problems similar to those of the new parties. On the one hand, they have no offices or full-time staff; on the other, the government is reluctant to take them seriously, and negotiates only with the established unions. Nevertheless, they have cracked the monopoly of the established unions, and in certain cases forced them to be more radical than they would otherwise have been.

Other significant non-trade union groups not involved in directly political activity include: the Base Communities (Catholic Christianity); Independent Service for Defence of Rights (legal aid); East-West Dialogue Network Circle (peace movement and alternatives to military service); Hungarian Boy Scouts Association and Large Families Association (both self-explanatory); Democratic Federation of Hungarian Gypsies, the Raoul Wallenberg Association, and Shalom Independent Hungarian Jewish Peace Group (all anti-racist); Refugees Committee (aid for refugees of all nationalities from Romania); the Committee for Historical Justice (clarification of 1956, rehabilitation of those wrongly condemned, and reburial of those in unnamed graves); the Media Club (freedom of speech and of the press); the Recsk Association of former prisoners in the Recsk labour camp; and the Danube Circle (ecology).<sup>9</sup>

### Crisis? What Crisis?

What led to this sudden rebirth of 'civil society'? The answer lies rather mundanely in a combination of two political truisms: that things only change when they can no longer go on in the old way, and that regimes are at their weakest when they begin to reform. The need for economic reform was only acknowledged when it became clear, primarily because of the size of the foreign debt, that the existing system simply could not continue. But this was over thirty years after the first reform economists had argued the case for change, to a

<sup>9</sup> The number of ecology groups, twenty-nine in all, classified under eight different headings, well illustrates the complexity of 'civil society' in Hungary today. See Kurrán, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-60.

system that was then scarcely six years old. The political origins of the explosion of political consciousness in 1988 can be located in the limited reform measures, both economic and political, introduced in the early 1980s. These reforms provided a material base outside the party-dominated state sector of the economy on which the forces of political pluralism could build. These two processes will be considered in turn, first the decades-long reluctance of the HSWP to accept the need for reform until the debt crisis rendered it inevitable, and on unfavourable terms; and second, the silent erosion of the HSWP's political monopoly.

The history of the current crisis began with the 13th congress of the HSWP in 1985 and the acceptance of the 7th five-year plan beginning in 1986. In order fully to appreciate the context of decisions taken at this time, however, it is appropriate to recall three decades of economic voluntarism in which the political leadership consistently ignored economic realities and, in the belief that it had put 'politics in command', either increased foreign debt (in the 1970s and 1980s) or impoverished the population to the point of revolt (1950s). The Soviet model of economic planning was introduced into Hungary in 1948, and by 1953 it was in crisis.<sup>20</sup> In 1954, the first articles appeared in the economic press calling for reform and listing nearly all the problems with centrally planned economies which have since become commonplace: poor quality, waste and shortage. Hungarian planners experienced two major problems with the traditional model of central planning. First, it was impossibly complex, even for a country as small as Hungary. Second, it proved impossible to develop from the labour theory of value a measure of relative value that was superior to market prices. Economists were fully conversant with Marxist theory, and knew they should be measuring savings in terms of socially necessary labour time, but they only succeeded in operationalizing the concept in terms of reducing costs, and costs based on prices that were becoming increasingly artificial.<sup>21</sup> They were less concerned at the time with the corollary of this weakness—namely, that in the absence of such a measure, the system is of necessity undemocratic. With no objective criterion by which to judge the merit of competing economic alternatives, the determinant necessarily becomes the subjective preference of those who hold power.

The solution proposed by György Péter in 1954 contained almost all the components of the New Economic Mechanism: enterprises to be made interested in indirect indicators, mainly profit; prices to be determined by supply and demand; capital charges to be introduced;

<sup>20</sup> The best account of Hungarian economic history between 1945 and 1968 is I. Peto and S. Szalkics, *A Magyar Gazdaság Négy Évtizedének Története 1945–85*, volume one, *Az Újjáépítés és a Termelési Átalakítás Idejei 1945–68*, Budapest 1985. Pages 151–319 deal with the 1950s.

<sup>21</sup> Symptomatic of this inability to operationalize economies in labour time is an article by G. Tauszik, 'A takarékoság kérdése a Központi Vezetőség októberi határozatának megvilágításában', *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 1954, No. 2, pp. 161–177. It starts off with quotations from Marx's *Grundrisse*, but when it comes to the crunch simply argues for the need to make savings by reducing costs.

and money to play an active role in economic management.<sup>12</sup> But when this mechanism was finally introduced after an interval of fourteen years, much was almost immediately withdrawn,<sup>13</sup> and the proposed second stage was never implemented.<sup>14</sup> Reassertion of central control, from 1972 onwards, coincided with the 'first oil shock', which adversely affected Hungary's terms of trade by some 20–30 per cent. Worse, the prevailing political wisdom analysed that shock as part of an international crisis of capitalism which would have no effect on Hungary.<sup>15</sup> Fast growth continued, necessitating extensive imports from the West which could only be paid for by increased foreign loans. Frightened by the mounting debt, at the end of the 1970s and in the first years of the 1980s, the government initiated two changes of direction: in 1978 it began a policy of reducing domestic consumption to try and contain the debt, while restructuring was supposed to take place; and in the 1980s it initiated a degree of institutional reform by reducing the number of ministries and promoting new forms of small co-operatives.<sup>16</sup>

The mid-1980s, when the current crisis began, were characterized by successive technical reforms, but continued resistance to change in the area of 're-structuring'. This resistance suggested that institutional reform was not enough, that a socio-economic interest was at stake, and that action in the political sphere would be necessary to defeat it. Developments were superficially contradictory. Hungary joined the IMF and the World Bank on successive days in June 1982, and a string of reforms followed which gave the international financial community the illusion of market relations, but which created only a 'semi-monetarized economy'.<sup>17</sup> The most significant of these was the creation of a fledgling stock market. This began to issue bonds in 1982, commenced trading in shares after reforms in 1986 permitted the creation of new public limited liability companies, established a notional Stock Exchange from 1 January 1989, and is now experimenting with ways of selling government debt. The concomitant of this embryonic capital market was the passing, in 1984 and 1986, of ever stricter regulations concerning bankruptcy. In addition, the system of wage regulation was relaxed in 1985, giving enterprises a greater interest in shedding unnecessary labour; 'dual banking' came into effect in 1987, with a bank of issue and competing commercial banks, rather than the previous system of task-specific banks; and in 1988 personal income tax and value-added tax were introduced.

<sup>12</sup> G. Péter, 'A gazdaságosság jelentőségéről és szerepéről a népgazdaság tervezési irányításában', *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 1954, No. 3, reproduced in L. Szamuely, ed., *A Magyar Közgazdasági Gondolat Fejlődése 1954–1978*, Budapest 1986.

<sup>13</sup> G. Hare, H.K. Radice and N. Swain, *Hungary. A Decade of Economic Reform*, London 1981, pp. 13–16.

<sup>14</sup> I.T. Berend, 'A magyar reform sorsfordulója az 1970-es években', *Valóság*, 1988, No. 1, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Berend, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> P.G. Hare, 'The Beginnings of Institutional Reform in Hungary', *Soviet Studies*, vol. xxv, July 1983; T. Lady, 'Small Enterprises in Hungary—Myth and Reality', *Acta Oeconomica*, Vol. 32, Nos 1–2.

<sup>17</sup> L. Lengyel, 'Végkifejlet IV', *Figyelő*, No. 1, 5 January 1989, p. 24.

## The Failure of Economic Policy

Analytically distinct from these 'semi-monetary' reforms was the extension of enterprise autonomy in 1985. Between 1985 and 1987 enterprises outside the 'non-profit sector' were obliged to transform themselves into one of two types: those run by an enterprise council, and those run by an elected management. The majority of rights stemming from the ownership of state property passed formally to the enterprise. The only rights of interference retained by 'founding organs' related to defence interests, although the National Materials and Prices Office could still intervene in the interest of domestic market relations, and the Foreign Trade Ministry in defence of international obligations. But in such cases enterprises were able to claim damages for any losses so incurred.<sup>18</sup> This gave enterprise management maximum autonomy from the state, but still allowed it access to limitless state funding. Despite provisions for worker representation, Enterprise Council democracy remained formal.<sup>19</sup> Management came under no control from the workforce. But neither did the relationship between the economic administration and enterprise management change in essence. Managers continued to have the bureaucracy's ear whenever additional funds were needed.<sup>20</sup> Bankruptcy procedures continued to be applied only rarely.<sup>21</sup> Budget constraints remained 'soft'.<sup>22</sup> Enterprise autonomy had been granted 'in a way that created no effective form of social control'.<sup>23</sup>

Economic developments in 1985 were further complicated by the fact that in addition to these reforms which created real autonomy within a 'semi-monetarized' economy, other measures were aimed directly against the market. On the one hand, a new sales tax was introduced to regulate the 'excessive' profits of the most popular forms of small business introduced in 1982. On the other, plan targets were set which bore no relation to economic reality. The 7th five year plan was 'just as unfulfillable as those of the 1950s'.<sup>24</sup> The HSWP's economic statement in the summer of 1987 attempted to correct this voluntarism but, just as in 1978, the emphasis was on administrative measures to reduce domestic consumption. After ten years of belt-tightening, it was clear that the political will that was being realized was the particular interest of large enterprises in self-preservation and easy

<sup>18</sup> T. Sárkozy, 'A gazdasági alkotmányosság lehetőségéről és szükségességéről Magyarországon', *Váltság*, 1986, No. 2, pp. 11-13.

<sup>19</sup> *Figyelő*, No. 21, 25 May 1989, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> M. Laki, 'A gazdaságirányítók elmaradt válaszáinak csemege', *Közgazdasági Szemle*, 1989, No. 5.

<sup>21</sup> An article in *Figyelő*, (No. 41, 13 October 1988, p. 7) notes that from the introduction of stricter bankruptcy procedures in 1986 to the end of September 1988, only three state enterprises had been closed down, compared with 171 Small Co-Operatives. For an analysis of the latest developments in the bureaucracy/large enterprise relationship see B. Szalai, 'Reformtörekvések és nagyvállalati érdekek az 80-as években', in L. Lengyel, *Tulajdonreform*, Budapest 1988, pp. 89-90.

<sup>22</sup> The classic work on 'soft budget constraints' is J. Kornai, *The Economics of Shortage*, Amsterdam 1980.

<sup>23</sup> *Figyelő*, No. 50, 15 December 1989, p. 3. The comment is by András Hegedűs.

<sup>24</sup> Ács, op. cit., p. 25. The words are those of László Lengyel.

profits from Eastern Bloc trade, and not the public interest. Yet the population was being told, again, to pay the price. For the public interest to be realized, however, two things were required: some form of control over enterprise management, and a model of political decentralization which would remove the definition of public interest from its centralized, uncontrollable sphere.<sup>25</sup>

The following table gives some indicative figures relating to Hungary's mushrooming foreign debt and failure to fund it through exports to the West. The huge size of the debt—approximately 1,600 dollars per head in 1988—is clear from the table, as is the fact that the most dramatic increases coincided with the years of re-centralist, voluntaristic economic policy, the mid-1970s and mid-1980s. The table also reveals that even in the years of a healthy dollar surplus, the bulk of dollar trade was internal to the socialist bloc, mainly in agricultural products, and not with the West. Even in the good years, there was no evidence of re-structuring and technological competitiveness with the West.

*Table 1: Hungary's Convertible Currency Trade and Debt*

Year	Gross cc Debt \$m	Gross cc Debt as % of GDP	Gross cc Debt Srv Ratio	Non-ruble Trade Total	Trade Bal. Soc \$m	Bal. Non- Soc
1971	1511					
1972	1867	23.7	24.5			
1973	2315	23.6				
1974	3105	27.9				
1975	3929	32.0				
1976	4531	33.2				
1977	5227	34.3				
1978	7586	38.2	31.1			
1979	8300	41.4				
1980	9090	39.1		-17	+ 563	-580
1981	8699	39.2		+ 50	+ 750	-700
1982	7715	35.6		+ 520	+ 770	-250
1983	8250	38.2		+ 655	+ 555	+ 100
1984	8836	42.2	50.2	+ 722	+ 432	+ 290
1985	11760	49.8	68.5	+ 302	+ 362	-62
1986	15086	56.6	87.7	-404	+ 146	-550
1987	17739	62.9	65.5	-361		
1988	17349	63.2	56.7	+ 572		

Debt figures are taken from *Figyelo* No. 16, 20/4/89, p. 15. These official figures have been published since June 1988. The foreign trade figures are taken from Cs. Vass 'Adósságok Tükreben', *Hírad*, 1989, No. 4, pp. 29-31 and checked against the Statistical Pocket Book for 1988. Central Statistical Office figures do not normally differentiate between socialist and non-socialist convertible currency trade.

<sup>25</sup> L. Bruszt, 'A centralizáció csapdája és a politikai rendszer reformalternatívái', *Művelődés*, 1988, No. 1.

Csaba Vass estimates that, on the optimistic assumption of an annual increase of exports of 5 per cent and imports of 1 per cent, Hungary's whole debt will be paid off by the year 2006, some thirty-three years after the beginning of significant debt; and that only in 2004 will the debt service ratio be down to a 'safe' 20 per cent. This is not an encouraging prospect for the 20.1 per cent of the population who lived below the social minimum, or the 9.1 per cent who lived below the minimum for survival in 1987; or, despite the introduction of unemployment benefit from January 1989, for the current 15,000 or so registered unemployed (a figure that will increase to 80,000 at least by the end of 1989); or, indeed, for anyone dependent on a wage since real wages were already at their 1975 level in 1988 and are planned to drop to their 1973 level by the end of 1989.

The economic base for dissatisfaction with the regime was thus certainly present by the late 1980s, but there was more to Hungary's outburst of democracy than that. Significant political opposition emerged in the 1980s, and its pace accelerated as the decade progressed. When it came to the crunch in 1988, two reforms of the early 1980s gave the political establishment problems they had not bargained with. First, the 1983 law which made multi-candidate elections compulsory, rather than merely desirable as they had been since 1966,<sup>26</sup> did allow the election of some 'trouble-maker' members of Parliament, despite HSWP rigging of candidate selection meetings when known opposition figures tried to stand. Some ten per cent of MPs elected in 1985 were citizens' nominees,<sup>27</sup> the most prominent of whom was Zoltán Király. Second, the regulations creating Small Co-operatives in 1982 had more than economic implications. It was not accidental that many of the big political meetings of 1988 took place in the Jurta Theatre, a Small Co-operative. It was one of the few venues in Budapest big enough to house a large meeting, yet immune from HSWP influence.

### Rise of the Opposition

The growth of an extensive, visible opposition in Hungary can be dated from around 1985. *Samizdat* organized by the Democratic Opposition was begun in 1976, although the informal circulating of re-typed manuscripts had existed for many years, and it became a permanent feature of the political landscape in the early 1980s when *Beszélő* began to appear as a regular journal. Indeed, János Kis, a long-standing Opposition member, describes 1980–81 as the 'best years' of the Democratic Opposition.<sup>28</sup> But the first major event in the history of the present crisis was the two-and-a-half-day political gathering held at Monor in June 1985. Organized by Ferenc Donáth, a veteran of 1956 and active Communist organizer during the war, this meeting was important not simply in that it took place at all, but in that it was the first attempt to bridge the 'urbanized'–'populist' gulf. Up till then the two strands had collaborated only on the production, in the late

<sup>26</sup> Law III of 1966.

<sup>27</sup> E. Hankiss, 'Demobilization, Self-Mobilization and Quasi-Mobilization in Hungary, 1948–87', *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1989, p. 145.

<sup>28</sup> J. Kis, 'A filozófiai intézettől a *Beszélő* szerkesztőségéig', *Vallás*, 1988, No. 12, p. 104.



1970s, of a volume in memory of István Bibó, whose profound sense of the specificity of Hungary's situation in Europe, combined with a radical liberalism, has made him an idol for all shades of the opposition.

In May 1986, at the suggestion of the Patriotic People's Front, then headed by Imre Pozsgay, the first of the groups that would later make up the Opposition Round Table, the Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Fraternal Society, was founded. But the next major development was the process surrounding the publication in 1987 of a document entitled *Turnabout and Reform*. Conceived in the spring of 1986 as a modest intervention by a number of reform economists who were horrified at the implications of the 7th five year plan, it went through several rounds of discussion by groups of experts and finally the Central Committee, and ended up as a major work with contributions by some sixty-eight authors.<sup>29</sup> The significance of the work, however, was not simply what it said—namely, that the government should resign because it was responsible for the mistakes in economic policy—but that it stated in a semi-official medium what previously only *samizdat* circles had been saying. It was able to do this because the authors had engineered the support of Imre Pozsgay for the project: officially the report was produced at the request of the Patriotic People's Front, and could hardly be suppressed. It was one of a number of examples of Pozsgay using his position as head of the Patriotic People's Front both to provide a protective umbrella for opposition causes, and to create an extra-Party power base for himself. Although the Central Committee debated the report, subsequent events suggest that it did not like it. The Finance Research Institute of the Ministry of Finance, where many of the economists worked, was closed 'for reasons of economy'. However, capitalizing on the new forms of enterprise permitted by the 1986 reforms, a new, independent Finance Research plc was formed which employed many of the redundant staff.

The remainder of 1987 witnessed another notable document, and another political gathering at which Pozsgay's influence could again be discerned. The document was the special June issue of the *samizdat* *Beszélő*, entitled 'The Social Contract'. It analysed the current situation, asserted that a crisis could not be avoided and called for political pluralism, an autonomous parliament and freedom for the press. Although it came out in favour of a multi-party system in principle, it did not think it was appropriate in the current situation. The gathering took place on 27 September, at the house of Sándor Lezsák in the village of Lakitelek, and marked the foundation of the HDF as a movement. Some 160 people attended to hear speeches by Pozsgay calling for political and social reform, by representatives of the populist opposition such as Gyula Fekete and István Czurka, and by Mihály Bihari, author of a much-discussed book on democracy and reform.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> L. Lengyel, 'Adalékok a Fordulat és Reform történetéhez', *Fordulat és Reform, Művelődés*, 1987, No. 2.

<sup>30</sup> M. Bihari, *Politikai Rendszerváltoztatás és Demokrácia* (second edition), Budapest 1989. The first edition was published in 1985, the second in February 1988. Between the two editions, indicative of the changing political climate, the word 'socialist' disappeared from the title.

Károly Grósz (then prime minister, now HSWP First Secretary) gave the meeting his blessing, but the position statement produced at the gathering was not made public until Pozsgay, to the horror of the party faithful, included most of its contents in an interview with *Magyar Nemzet* in November.

The decision to hold a special Party Conference between 20 and 22 May 1988 was taken in December 1987. In the ensuing six months, the Kádár wing of the Party appeared to be incapable of appreciating the new social mood. It lashed out unthinkingly in order to suppress dissent, while reform-minded individuals went ahead and created alternative institutions and mobilized opposition support. In December, Kádár made the first of a series of speeches and television appearances denying the existence of a crisis, while Nyers and others inside and outside the party began talking about forming the New March Front, an umbrella group for unifying the nation. More significantly, on 30 January 1988 the HDF held the first of a series of public meetings at Jurta Theatre on the role of Parliament. An estimated five hundred people were present, and HSWP members were instructed not to attend on threat of expulsion. Similar meetings were held on 6 March, on the subject of Hungarians living abroad, and 15 May, on the subject of the media, attracting even bigger audiences and no Party interdict.

On 17 March, Kádár addressed the country on television stating again 'there is no question of any sort of crisis . . . everyone has to do their work as before, only better and more diligently.' Yet on the same day, the Network of Free Initiatives came into being. This umbrella group, initiated by the Democratic Opposition, had hoped to cover all opposition groups, but the central core of the HDF rejected the idea. Most, though not all, under the umbrella transformed themselves into the FFD some months later. At about the same time, two of the other groups which were to play a role in the post-May politics established themselves: the FYD, on 30 March, and the Democratic Union of Scientific Workers on 16 May. Meanwhile, in a final desperate move to restore party discipline, which only strengthened the reformers' hands, on 9 April the party expelled four prominent reformers: Mihály Bihari, a political scientist active in the New March Front, Zoltán Bíró, literary historian and founder of the HDF, Zoltán Király, member of parliament and journalist active in the New March Front, and László Lengyel, an economist active in the New March Front and one of the organizers of *Turnabout and Reform*.

#### The HSWP: in Power, in Crisis, and Not in Control

Since the Party Conference of May 1988 the HSWP has remained the party in power, in that it governs with a clear majority of parliamentary seats. However, as summer turned to winter, and winter to spring, it became clear that party discipline was wearing exceedingly thin. The reformist wing became ever more vocal in its demands for change. At the same time, the party leadership was obliged to accommodate itself to an unfamiliar form of politics in which, although it held the trump cards, the agenda was increasingly set by forces outside its control.

The period from May 1988 to the present falls neatly into seasonal sections. The summer of 1988 was characterized by uncertainty. Despite the extensive recomposition of the HSWP leadership—'the most radical and most peaceful change of guard in a communist party leadership that has ever happened under normal conditions'<sup>31</sup>—it was not immediately apparent that the May Party Conference was more than a palace revolution, especially as local party organizations appeared unwilling to follow the national lead and have their own conferences. During the summer, the signs were ambiguous. On the pro-reform side, the Party appointed the reformists Straub and Kulcsár as President of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Justice respectively, and permitted a demonstration against Romania's village policy in June. In July, the Party adopted the more radical of two proposed economic programmes, and both Pozsgay and Grósz made speeches suggesting that a multi-party system was not inconceivable. In August, Grósz declared that he would give up the premiership as soon as possible; the government's review of the constitution began; and the government issued the first draft of proposed laws on assembly and association for public debate. On the anti-reform side, in June a demonstration commemorating Nagy's death was broken up, and in August, Pozsgay was prevented by his party's Political Committee from having a joint meeting with the Network of Free Initiatives, the HDF, the FYD, the Democratic Union of Scientific Workers, and the Greens. Only secret meetings with each group individually were permitted. Meanwhile, the opposition continued the tactic of large public gatherings. Between 25 and 31 August one such was held at the Balatonszemes Express camp near to Szárszó, the place where, in 1943, the 'populists' had discussed their conception of post-war society. The topics for discussion included property relations, self-management, reform of the political system, the environment and alternatives in Eastern Europe.

It was only in the autumn of 1988 that the die was cast firmly in favour of reform. It was as if the reform activists all came back from their summer holidays refreshed and ready for action, the impetus of the spring renewed. On 5 September, at Lakitelek once more, the HDF held a second meeting at which it transformed itself from a movement into an organization with a membership, capable of running candidates at forthcoming elections. Between 12 and 17 September a series of Reform Party Evenings was organized, of which the one at Budapest's Technical University addressed by Pozsgay attracted an audience of two thousand. On 23 September the first issues of the new periodicals *Reform* and *Kapu* appeared, and the Central Committee declared itself ready, on the 27th, to talk to the New March Front and Hungarian Democratic Forum, whilst warning that they included anti-socialist forces. As if to counter such forces, the Left-Wing Alternative Association was founded on the 28th.

If September saw a rebirth of opposition activity, October gave it something to get angry about: the parliamentary session from the fifth to the seventh. This session passed the proposed company law for

---

<sup>31</sup> Extract from a book by Paul Lendvai reproduced in *História*, 1989, No. 5, pp. 16–17

1989 which, among other things, permitted individuals to buy shares, as opposed to bonds, for the first time; saw the entrepreneurs tax proposal withdrawn (it was passed in the following session); but, most contentiously, was bullied into accepting the government's statement on continuing the Bős-Nagymaros dam. By 317 votes to 19 with 31 abstentions, parliament favoured continuation, despite a government-sponsored report produced by the Academy of Sciences which recommended that building work should be stopped. The growing conviction amongst the opposition that democracy could not be achieved in the context of the existing one-party system was reinforced.

As autumn turned to winter, the spectre of a multi-party system began to haunt the HSWP. The first developments came in November. Although in speeches that month Berecz claimed that pluralism was possible in the context of a one-party system, and Grósz maintained that a multi-party system was inappropriate for the age, Pozsgay now was of the persuasion that 'classical experience shows that the simplest technology in this respect (pluralism) is the multi-party system'. Eight days later, the FFD was formally constituted. Two days earlier, the Ferenc Münnich Society had been founded, reflecting the concern with which certain HSWP members viewed events. Even worse for the HSWP, the old rival, the Smallholders Party, was re-founded in Szentendre on the twelfth and in the Pilvax coffee house on the eighteenth. The issue of a multi-party system also reached the parliamentary session of the twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth when Zoltán Király suggested, unsuccessfully, the introduction of a limited system whereby the HSWP would be guaranteed 51 per cent representation. The Social Democrats joined the fray in January 1989, and on 14 January the New March Front made the first attempt to establish dialogue between the HSWP and the new parties. It suggested the formation of a Country-wide National Committee, comprising opposition and government parties alike, which would be vested with the power to pass legislation until such time as elections were held. The idea was still-born because the HDF had personal objections to László Gyurkó and Sándor Fekete of the New March Front, whom they regarded as Kádáristas.

### Towards a Multi-Party System

February 1989 marked the end of the period of genesis of the *de facto* multi-party system when, in addition to its historic reappraisal of 1956 as a 'popular uprising', the HSWP Central Committee formally accepted the prospect of a multi-party future. The month also witnessed an important development in the beginning of the next phase. The first three months of multi-party politics in practice were characterized by two features: stalemate in negotiations between the HSWP and the opposition, and accelerated reform within the HSWP itself. The first evidence of the latter began on 7 February when the inaugural meeting of an HSWP Reform Circle took place in Csongrád county, with approximately one hundred participants. Its principal demands were open Central Committee sessions, reformist economic policies, and the calling of an exceptional Party Congress or Confer-

ence in 1989. In March, the Opposition Round Table came into being, a more modest attempt to unify the opposition around a negotiating strategy. With so many actors now in the game, all realized the danger that the HSWP might revive 'salami tactics' to pick them off one by one. The month had begun with a Central Committee meeting on the seventh at which Berecz stated that the HSWP was ready to participate in coalition government, and also saw the first National Convention of the HDF.

In April, the shape of the first phase of multi-party politics was set firm. Negotiations between the leaders of the HSWP and the Opposition Round Table stalled. The opposition refused to attend the HSWP's proposed round table discussion on 8 April because the HSWP rejected its terms, namely that all members of the Opposition Round Table should be invited to the talks, that the negotiations should be two-sided and each side should express its opinion alternately, that the chair should rotate, that there should be a joint communiqué, and that there should be a concrete agenda which should include the subject of elections and a number of other important issues. The HSWP wanted a non-specific agenda of solving the crisis, and a round table meeting in the traditional sense, with all shades of opinion represented, including the Ferenc Münnich Society, the Patriotic People's Front and other groups that are generally considered Party 'fronts'. But if negotiations stalled, the reform wing within the HSWP scored a succession of victories. Hard-liners Lukács and Berecz lost their position on the Political Committee; a Reform Workshop was held at Kecskemét at which eighty representatives from thirty groups listened to speeches demanding a Party Congress in the autumn and the resignation of Kádár as Party president; and the Political Committee was obliged to decree that horizontal links between Reform Circles (that is to say, party factions) were permitted.

KP 3418

The month of May continued the succession of victories for the reformers. Kádár was relieved of his post as Party President. Work on the Bős-Nagymaros dam was suspended. The Party resolved to relinquish control of its private militia, the Workers' Guard, and have it integrated into the army. At the beginning of May, the HSWP leadership promised a Party Conference for the autumn. But by the end of the month, following the first National Council of Reform Circles at Szeged on 20 May, the Central Committee changed its mind. The autumn would now see a full Party Congress. Not only this, it was also decided that in future the Party First Secretary and President should be elected by all 750,000 party members.

At the very end of the month, however, a new phase of multi-party politics began. By the summer of 1989, the stalemate of the spring was broken and negotiations had begun. On 29 May the HSWP offered greatly revised terms to the Opposition Round Table which were not rejected out of hand. In return for the HSWP's acceptance that meetings should produce binding agreements, and for its willingness to join the other parties in signing a document renouncing the exclusive right to issue orders to the armed forces, the Opposition Round Table gave way on the issue of a third party to the talks made up of 'front'

organizations. On 10 June it was announced that talks would begin on the thirteenth.

### What Next? Coalition and Property Reform

In our discussion of the background to the current crisis it was suggested that 'things could not go on in the old way'. But this says nothing about the path they will now follow. Political forecasting is inherently risky, yet a complete analysis of any given political situation must include an evaluation of trends immanent within it.

First, the short term. If, as seems probable, Grósz loses power to Pozsgay at the HSWP Congress in the autumn, then two things follow.<sup>32</sup> First, the prospects for some sort of reformed Hungary will be good, even if Gorbachev is defeated in the Soviet Union. Second, a break-up of the HSWP into reformers and old guard will be most unlikely. Grósz's defeat will indicate that the reformers have won. It is not inconceivable that 'the so-called fundamentalists will form a separate left party',<sup>33</sup> or that the Ferenc Münnich Society and Workers' Guard will force a confrontation,<sup>34</sup> but there is increasing evidence that things will not happen in this way. The forces of reform have three important points in their favour: their youth (the 'old guard' are all old men), the support of the IMF and World Bank (in that these institutions call for the sorts of reductions in subsidies and economic restructuring the reformists favour), and the fact that the time has passed for the policies favoured by the hard-liners. The latter are Kádárist, not Stalinists or Ceauşescuites: they want a return to the compromise of the Kádár era, not to Stalinism. But the only viable options for solving the debt problem are reform or Ceauşescu-like repression, as events in Poland and China confirm. It is also extremely unlikely that elements within the HSWP could form a party of 'order' which would suspend political pluralism yet impose market reforms. Politically, such a party could operate only through the very administrative structures whose power a market reform seeks to weaken.

Second, elections must take place by the summer of 1990, and are expected to be held in the spring. The timing of the elections is crucial. All the new parties suffer from a weak national network, although in most localities at least one opposition party is represented. The earlier elections are held, the more likely the opposition is to field joint candidates. The later the elections, the more likely the parties are to stand separately, which would split the opposition vote. If elections

---

<sup>32</sup> Grósz's eventual fall was virtually assured at the Central Committee meeting of 23–24 June 1989. This kept him on as nominal First Secretary, but created a new four-man praesidium (Grósz, Pozsgay, Nyers and prime minister Németh) to run the party until the Party Congress, now scheduled for 7 October, when a new leadership would be elected. Pozsgay's precise ambitions are unclear. He has stated he is interested in leading the HSWP; on the other hand, the 23–24 June Central Committee meeting announced he would be the HSWP candidate for the new post of state president. At the same time he continues to maintain an extra-HSWP power base.

<sup>33</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 17 April 1989, interview with Berecz.

<sup>34</sup> Ferenc Kulín, 'Axiomák és alternatívák', *Husz*, 1989 No. 4, pp. 47–50

are brought forward to the autumn, the HSWP will be in a position to exploit the opposition's unpreparedness to field even joint candidates. But whether the HSWP takes on joint or separate candidates at the elections, the outcome will be a coalition government whose composition will also be affected by timing. The Smallholders and Social Democrats will fare worse if elections are held before they can heal their internal rifts and before their names and political traditions have become more established. This is especially true of the Social Democrats, who have the whole of the Second International behind them. However, it would be a mistake to underestimate the continuing attractiveness of the HSWP to certain sectors of the electorate. Business people prefer stable governments to ideology. Hungary's new entrepreneurs are politically conservative,<sup>35</sup> and it is by no means inconceivable that they will support the HSWP, especially if it is dominated by reformists. The state of the parties as polled by the Hungarian Public Opinion Research Institute in March-April was as follows: The picture is not out of line with the results of the recent Polish elections.

*Table 2: Voting Intentions March-April 1989 (%)*

	Budapest	Towns (2)	Villages (4)
HSWP	26	29	50
Social Democrats	12	10	9
HDF	22	19	7
FFD	15	10	8
Smallholders	5	12	13
HPP	6	8	8
FYD	11	10	4

*Source: HUNGARY, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1989, p. 19. The percentages are of those who answered the question.<sup>36</sup>*

Second, the medium term. That some sort of property reform, privatization or re-privatization will take place is clear. It forms part of the programme of all the parties likely to participate in a future coalition government, and is advocated both by the government's Economic Reform Committee and, less forthrightly, by the HSWP's own economic committee. The following discussion concentrates most on the contrasting proposals of the Economic Reform Committee and the FFD, because these two bodies have the most fully elaborated views. The HDF, for example, argues that towns and villages, enterprise collectives, and educational and health institutions should be able to own property, but simply calls for a way to be devised by which the rest of state property can be made to work more efficiently. The Social Democrats call for a radical reform of property

<sup>35</sup> See report in *Figyelő*, No. 17, 27 April 1989, p. 24 of the results of a national survey of political attitudes.

<sup>36</sup> The HSWP share is somewhat lower than in a survey published in 1988 *Óra*, Vol. 1, No. 1 based on a telephone survey.

relations and a mixed economy. Like the Smallholders Party, they appear to favour a straightforward sale of assets to anyone who can afford to buy them. For the Social Democrats, the influence of the new bourgeoisie will then be checked by a strong state committed to social justice; for the Smallholders Party, only a minimal state correction of market forces is necessary. The following discussion also ignores the 'restructuring law' (to allow existing state enterprises to become limited liability companies) which was passed, with amendments, by parliament at the end of May. At the proposal stage this law was severely criticized, by opposition and HSWP experts alike, for being poorly constructed. Its loose drafting is indeed intentional. It is likely to be radically amended by a new coalition government, and even its drafters accept that it is only a precursor to property reform.

The conceptions of the government committee and the FFD both rely on the theoretical writings of reform economists in the early and mid 1980s who addressed the issue of how to impose both democratic control and 'hard budget constraints' on Hungary's large enterprises.<sup>37</sup> The differences between the government and FFD reflect both a divergence of opinion present within these writings, and elements of the power base of the two political groups. The solution the economists of the 1980s came up with was to reinvent property and, more important, a market in property. The former would introduce greater identification, the latter increased anonymity. In the economists' view, property in itself would enhance commitment and incentives generally, on the grounds that people have a greater interest in assets they own than in those they merely handle for a third party. A property market, on the other hand, would allow the development of two things: 'external ownership', and the creation of the necessary conditions for ending monopolies. The ownership of shares in enterprises by 'external' parties was seen as a means of wresting ultimate control of the enterprise from any individual directly involved in its operation. Ownership would thus become sufficiently anonymous to impose the necessary 'hard budget constraints' on enterprises. 'External owners', it was argued, would be interested primarily in maximizing their long-term or short-term benefit, not in the fate of any particular enterprise they happened to have shares in. The existence of a market in enterprise shares would also facilitate the creation of new companies prepared to compete in any sector where profitable production was likely, so reducing the incidence of monopoly.

### Three Scenarios

Three scenarios evolved for creating these new ownership relations.<sup>38</sup> The first envisaged 'cross ownership', by which state enterprises would be obliged to become public limited companies and buy shares in each other, while banks would be encouraged to expand their

<sup>37</sup> For an account of the history of writings on property reform, see L. Lengyel, 'A tulajdonviszák története és a reform', in Lengyel, ed., *Tulajdonreform*, Budapest 1988.

<sup>38</sup> The following is based on discussions with Pál Juhász, economic spokesperson of the Federation of Free Democrats. A similar account can be derived from Lengyel, op. cit.



holdings in non-banking sectors. The second, 'self-management' scenario envisaged an extension of the Enterprise Council developments of 1985 by giving workers shares in their own enterprises. And the third was what the FFD describes as 'resocialization'. According to this scenario, all bodies formerly funded from the state budget, such as local authorities, educational institutions, hospitals and cultural institutions, should become self-governing. Rather than receive a cash grant from the government, the necessary credit mechanism should be created for them to establish a foundation from which they would maintain a portfolio of shares. These self-governing holders of community property would then enter the market, via a network of broking institutions (which would have to be created), and become significant 'external' share-holders in the nation's assets.

The FFD is a strong advocate of this third scenario and considers that 60 to 70 per cent of state property should become community property in this way. Like the government committee, it rejects the 'self-government' solution, partly because it was seen to have failed in 1985, but also, following the standard arguments against self-managed economic units, because it is considered to be inherently conservative.<sup>39</sup> The FFD also regards the 'cross ownership' scenario as potentially conservative in that the market would not be sufficiently diverse to encourage the flow of foreign capital into new, as opposed to joint, ventures. More fundamentally, they question how 'external' such 'cross ownership' shareholders could be, and suggest that under such a scenario, a situation could easily develop in which 'the management elite would be the final owners'.<sup>40</sup> This they want to avoid, not so much on socialist grounds, as because of the poor record of socialist managers.

The published statements of the Economic Reform Committee suggest this is an exaggeration. Its programme includes reference to community property, which 'should play an ever greater role', but considers it will take at least three years for the prerequisite forms of credit arrangements to be introduced. The programme focuses on the need to convert state enterprises to public limited companies, and on the need to establish a state Property Fund to buy those shares which are not immediately purchased by commercial banks, insurance companies, other companies, foreigners and occasionally private individuals.<sup>41</sup> A difference of emphasis is clear, but the strength of the FFD's opposition lies in the fact that parliament is made up of enterprise managers and local party and government officials who are in day-to-day contact with managers and inclined to take their view. Such a parliament is unlikely to take much notice of community property if it is eventually presented as something desirable but difficult to achieve.

Some kind of property reform will take place in Hungary in the next three years. Given the likely electoral strengths of the HSWP and the

---

<sup>39</sup> This literature is concisely discussed in C. Cornforth et al., *Developing Successful Worker Co-operatives*, London 1988, pp. 40-47.

<sup>40</sup> See interview with Pál Juhász in *Figyelő*, No. 13, 30 March 1989.

<sup>41</sup> See *Figyelő*, No. 18, 4 May 1989, pp. 9-12.

FFD, something approaching the 'cross ownership' scenario seems most likely. An additional feature might be the development of the Property Fund into one or more state holding companies. These were discussed in the early 1980s and rejected, but are briefly mentioned in the government proposals. But the finding of buyers for unprofitable state enterprises may well prove to be a bigger problem than the three scenarios allow.

In a situation where so much emphasis is being placed on market and property reform, and where economists spend so much of their time devising mechanisms for privatization, it is easy to get the impression that Hungarians have decided to leave all in the hands of the market. This is not the case. Even in the radical FFD conception, the state plays a role, not only in supervising the market, regulating monopolies and so on, but also in planning. Only the role of planning is reduced more or less to 'indicative planning': that is to say, to the estimation of future prices (needed for investment decisions); guidance about alternative development paths (to accommodate uncertainty); and demand and supply information (to reduce the costs inherent in making any transaction).<sup>42</sup> A mechanism remains for the development of a national industrial strategy, but the National Technical Development Committee is not alone in suggesting that insufficient attention has been paid to what form it might take.<sup>43</sup>

In fact the role of the state is likely to be greater than all parties, except perhaps the Social Democrats, suggest. Under all conceptions the state continues to play a role in pursuing socially desirable goals, only in a new way. Market principles should prevail, but not market values. All parties are suspicious of the state, as they are of all forms of monopoly, and advocate a move away from systems of unlimited state provision in education, health and welfare. The FFD even proposes unemployment benefits on a partly competitive insurance basis, and market methods of positive discrimination (negative income tax is an example given). They all believe that nothing could be worse than the present system, in which the state has failed to provide the service it promised because social security payments went into an undifferentiated state budget and ended up subsidizing unrestructured, ownerless industry. Yet all parties also insist that the state should ensure, if not directly fund, a minimum level of provision in all these spheres, with true competition only for services above the minimum. The definition of 'minimum' is the crucial factor here, but after forty years of a system that promised complete provision free of charge, expectations of a 'minimum' service are likely to be high, and so too the premiums charged by the new insurers. In this context a state system, once freed of the burdens of supporting a stagnating economy, might turn out to be the most economic solution. It should also be noted that, although all parties rejected the 'self-government' model for property reform, they all support independent trade unions, encourage co-operatives and are in favour of improved workplace democ-

---

<sup>42</sup> P. G. Hare, *Planning the British Economy*, London 1985, pp. 117-23.

<sup>43</sup> *Figyelo*, No. 3, 19 January 1989, pp. 4 & 17.

racy. The forms of worker self-organization advocated by the Left-Wing Alternative can be quite easily accommodated in an enterprise under the ultimate control of the FFD's 'external' shareholders.

But what of the longer term? Will the policies work? The answer is probably 'yes'. It will be at the expense of a considerable increase in unemployment, as all parties accept, at least in the short term; and the degree of foreign investment is likely to be less than hoped for. Hungary has no raw materials; its labour is not especially cheap in global terms, nor especially skilled; it is a tiny market on its own, and provides no access to a larger one, for Comecon is not a single market. Nevertheless there is probably a role in Europe for Hungary as a poorer Austria, and this corresponds to the Hungarian self-image.

### Crisis, Whose Crisis?

How should these changes in Hungary be characterized? They are certainly part of a structural crisis in Eastern European economies, a crisis manifest in the inability of the socialist economic mechanism to restructure, to keep up with the 'micro-chip revolution'. This crisis has most affected those countries like Poland and Hungary at a middle level of development, no longer able to live off mental and material reserves of the pre-war period and the industrial infrastructure created by the first phase of socialist industrialization as Czechoslovakia and the GDR are doing, yet with a more vocal professional class than Bulgaria and Romania. The Polish and Hungarian situations are identical in their calls for economic reform; they differ with regard to the political role of the church and the weight of the opposition movement. The current HSWP leaders are indebted to Kádár's successful compromise of the 1960s and 1970s for the absence of a Solidarity-like mass movement in Hungary.

But whose crisis is it, and why now? It is tempting to blame history. One view in this vein maintains that historical stages cannot be jumped, that socialism was imposed too early and society will have to go back through a bourgeois phase and learn the positive 'citizen' values of bourgeois society. A variation on this theme is the approach which holds that the societies were essentially feudal in the first place, and that the strong middle class that was absent in the first half of the century, so facilitating the rise of fascist regimes, has been created by 'socialist industrialization' and is now coming to power.<sup>44</sup>

The analysis presented above suggests that these are evasions, that the crisis must be located squarely in socialism, or at least a particular type of socialist model, and that the forces at work are not the hidden forces of history or a silent bourgeois revolution, but the owners, managers and workers of that socialism's economic system. In an earlier work I argued, in the guarded tones that befit a book derived from a doctoral dissertation, that managerial control over the method

---

<sup>44</sup> Neither of these views is clearly articulated to my knowledge, but they are the sorts of ideas that are in the air. Iván Székényi (*Socialist Entrepreneurs: Embourgeoisment in Rural Hungary*, Cambridge 1988) comes close to arguing the second case.

of plan fulfilment, and use of that control to further management's narrow group interests, created a class-like relationship within production.<sup>45</sup> Although I then located the manifestation of that crisis in labour policy rather than failed restructuring and mounting foreign debt, the account presented above suggests that this class-like relationship has persisted. Hungary's current political and economic changes represent this management-controlled, class-like socialist economy in, perhaps terminal, crisis.

But what is the answer? The property reforms suggested by Hungarian government and opposition parties alike strike at the core of socialist notions of collective ownership; yet their challenge should be faced. Hungary's 'market socialism' of 1968 addressed real economic planning problems of distribution and supply, and solved them more successfully than its actually existing socialist neighbours who rejected the market. Hungarian consumers enjoy a wider range of goods, in more plentiful supply, although not necessarily of higher quality. Under these reforms the market played a minimal role in investment. Hungary's increasing technology gap with the West and its concomitant inability to restructure Western trade in order to pay off its debt, have convinced economists that this was a mistake and that a genuine capital market is required. Three years' experience of nominally self-managed enterprises in industry, but over twenty years' experience of nominally self-managed worker co-operatives in agriculture,<sup>46</sup> together with a body of not-implausible literature on the inherent conservatism of worker-managed enterprises, have convinced them that external shareholders rather than self-managed worker collectives should be the chief actors on this market. To the arguments of Western socialists that genuine democratic direct economic planning would have obviated the need for 'market socialist' reform, or that genuinely democratic self-managed enterprises within 'market socialism' need not be inherently conservative, they would point to both practical and theoretical problems. First, genuine day-to-day workplace democracy has proved everywhere difficult to implement in practice, even in small worker co-operatives made up of committed individuals.<sup>47</sup> Second, the assumption that democratic decisions taken in one unit will not work against the interests of those taken in another, or at another level in the planning system, only holds in conditions approaching abundance.<sup>48</sup> In conditions the very opposite of abundance, where undemocratic direct planning has been tried and found wanting, the Hungarian decision in favour of property reform as a means of restraining managerial power is certainly not irrational. In a situation where the only other realistic political option is economic isolation and an even greater decline in living standards, it may be the only way of rescuing something socialist from Hungary's socialist project. And if this is the case, then the

---

<sup>45</sup> N. Swain, *Collective Farms Which Work?*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 188–93.

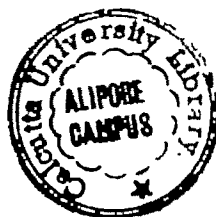
<sup>46</sup> For a comparison of the 1985 reforms in industry with the existing relations in agriculture, see N. Swain, 'Hungarian Agriculture in the Early 1980s: Retrenchment Followed by Reform', *Soviet Studies*, vol. xxxix, No. 1, January 1987, p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> See Cornforth et al., op. cit., chapters 6–8.

<sup>48</sup> F. Fehér, Á. Heller and Gy. Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs*, Oxford 1983, pp. 90–91.

FFD's model of a community-property dominated economy in which workers exercise much-mediated control as consumers, rather than one in which the old management transforms itself into a new bourgeoisie, requires serious consideration, even if the FFD declines to consider it socialist.

The eventual outcome will be determined more by the play of social forces as unemployment grows and ceases to be a mainly regional, unskilled worker problem, than by the votes cast in multi-party elections. Many a free market illusion is likely to be shattered, and the FFD's call for market techniques without market values may founder. Meanwhile the current play of political forces was well encapsulated in the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy and his colleagues on 16 June 1989, which symbolized both reconciliation with the past and the birth of the new. Here was the strength of the opposition, reflected in the facts that the event could take place at all, and that such critical voices could be raised. Here was both the division within the HSWP and the new significance of the government, reflected in the fact that Nemeth and Pozsgay appeared not as HSWP members but in their government capacity. But here too was the ambiguity of current Hungarian politics reflected in the career of the man they were burying. Nagy was the man who gave the land to the peasants, a nationalist, an economic reformer, an advocate of multi-party democracy, and a Communist. Today's Hungary is developing its nationalist party, its pro-peasant party, its radical economic reform party; but so long as there is a Communist whom all strands can claim as ancestor, the HSWP is likely to remain a significant political force. Reform communists can claim a pedigree which is esteemed by all.



## New Books in the Series PostModernPositions

### Open Form and the Feminine Imagination: The Politics of Reading in Twentieth-Century Innovative Writing

*Stephen-Paul Martin*

Martin, the editor of *Central Park*, takes a deep look at the political implications of avant-garde writers Major, Sukenick, Howe, Silliman, Harryman, and others.  
paper \$9.90 / cloth \$18.70

### Interventions: Displacing the Metaphysical Subject

*Keith C. Pheby*

In plain speaking, Pheby shows how the poststructuralism of Derrida and Foucault provides our best hope for a new world grounding that may avoid the dire consequences of autonomous individualism.

paper \$9.90 / cloth \$18.70

### Ethics/Aesthetics: Post-Modern Positions

*Edited by Robert Merrill*

Eleven new essays by Harpham, Cascardi, Hutcheon, Holland, and other prominent scholars exploring history, being, power, otherness, ideology, and postmodernism in the discourse of ethics and aesthetics.  
paper \$9.90 / cloth \$18.70

### Philosophical Streets

*Edited by Dennis Crow*

Beginning with Adorno's "Culture and Administration" these six essays explore the relation of critical theory to the applied disciplines of architecture and urban design.

paper \$9.50 / cloth \$18.50

### This is Not an Essence: Dali as Postmodernist

*Marc LaFountain*

Discusses the art of Salvador Dali and the phenomenology of Husserl. Shows the roots of many important postmodern writers in surrealism.

paper 8.50 / cloth 16.50

# POSTMODERNISM

# JAMESON

# CRITIQUE

Edited By  
**Douglas Kellner**

## Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique

*Edited by Douglas Kellner*

These fifteen new essays appraise Fredric Jameson's attempt to re-theorize Marxism and ideas of late capitalism as the master framework for conceptualizing postmodernism.

Includes Jameson's response to the poststructuralist critique of Marxism, an extensive bibliography of postmodern critical theory, and a comprehensive bibliography of Jameson's work. "The list of contributors is impressively diversified. Kellner's introduction gives us the fullest historical account of the Jameson phenomenon to date. . . . A monumental text"—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

paper \$15.50 / cloth \$29.00

— Order directly from the publisher —

## Maisonneuve Press

P. O. Box 2980  
Washington, DC 20013-2980 USA

(include US \$1.00 for postage - USA/Canada  
\$2.00 for postage - overseas)

*Publications of the  
Institute for Advanced Cultural Studies*

## Marxism and Postmodernism

Marxism and postmodernism: people often seem to find this combination peculiar or paradoxical, and somehow intensely unstable, so that some of them are led to conclude that, in my own case, having 'become' a postmodernist, I must have ceased to be a Marxist in any meaningful (or in other words stereotypical) sense.\* For the two terms (in full postmodernism) carry with them a whole freight of pop nostalgia images, 'Marxism' perhaps distilling itself into yellowing period photographs of Lenin and the Soviet revolution, and 'postmodernism' quickly yielding a vista of the gaudiest new hotels. The over-hasty unconscious then rapidly assembles the image of a small, painstakingly reproduced nostalgia restaurant—decorated with the old photographs, with Soviet waiters sluggishly serving bad Russian food—hidden away within some gleaming new pink and blue architectural extravaganza. If I may indulge a personal note, it has happened to me before to have been oddly and comically identified with an object of study: a book I published years ago on structuralism elicited letters, some of which addressed

me as a 'foremost' spokesperson for structuralism, while the others appealed to me as an 'eminent' critic and opponent of that movement. I was really neither of those things, but I have to conclude that I must have been 'neither' in some relatively complicated and unusual way that it seemed hard for people to grasp. As far as postmodernism is concerned, and despite the trouble I took in my principal essay on the subject to explain how it was not possible intellectually or politically simply to celebrate postmodernism or to 'disavow' it (to use a word to which I will return), avant-garde art critics quickly identified me as a vulgar-Marxist hatchet man, while some of the more simplehearted comrades concluded that, following the example of so many illustrious predecessors, I had finally gone off the deep end and become a 'post-Marxist' (which is to say, a renegade and a turncoat).

I am therefore particularly grateful to Doug Kellner for his thoughtful introductory demonstration of the ways in which this new topic is not alien to my earlier work but rather a logical consequence of it, something I want to rehearse again myself in terms of the notion of a 'mode of production', to which my analysis of postmodernism claims to make a contribution. It is first worth observing, however, that my version of all this—which obviously (but perhaps I haven't said so often enough) owes a great debt to Baudrillard, as well as to the theorists to whom he is himself indebted (Marcuse, McLuhan, Henri Lefebvre, the situationists, Sahlins, etc., etc.)—took form in a relatively complicated conjuncture. It was not only the experience of new kinds of artistic production (particularly in the architectural area) that roused me from the canonical 'dogmatic slumbers': I will want to make the point later on that as I use it, 'postmodernism' is not an exclusively aesthetic or stylistic term. The conjuncture also offered the occasion for resolving a long-standing *malaise* with traditional economic schemas in the Marxist tradition, a discomfort felt by a certain number of us not in the area of social class, whose 'disappearance' only true 'free-floating intellectuals' could be capable of entertaining, but in the area of the media, whose shock-wave impact on Western Europe enabled the observer to take a little critical and perceptual distance from the gradual and seemingly natural mediatization of North American society in the 1960s.

### A Third Stage of Capitalism

Lenin on imperialism did not quite seem to equal Lenin and the media, and it gradually seemed possible to take his lesson in a different way. For he set the example of identifying a new stage of capitalism that was not explicitly foreseen in Marx: the so-called monopoly stage, or the moment of classical imperialism. That could lead you to believe, either that the new mutation had been named and formulated once and for all; or that one might be authorized to invent

---

\* This essay, reprinted from *Postmodernism/Jackson/Critique*, ed. Douglas Kellner (Masonneuve Press, Washington D.C. 1989), concludes and responds to a collection of fourteen other essays commissioned to assess the relations of Marxism, poststructuralism and postmodernism



yet another one under certain circumstances. But Marxists were all the more unwilling to draw this second, antithetical conclusion, because in the meantime the new mediatic and informational social phenomena had been colonized (in our absence) by the Right, in a series of influential studies in which the first tentative Cold War notion of an 'end of ideology' finally gave birth to the full-blown concept of a 'post-industrial society' itself. Ernest Mandel's book *Late Capitalism* changed all that, and for the first time theorized a third stage of capitalism from a useably Marxian perspective.<sup>1</sup> This is what made my own thoughts on 'postmodernism' possible, which are therefore to be understood as an attempt to theorize the specific logic of the cultural production of that third stage, and not as yet another disembodied culture critique or diagnosis of the spirit of the age.

It has not escaped anyone's attention that my approach to postmodernism is a totalizing one. The interesting question today is then not why I adopt this perspective, but why so many people are scandalized (or have learned to be scandalized) by it. In the old days, abstraction was surely one of the strategic ways in which phenomena, particularly historical phenomena, could be estranged and defamiliarized; when one is immersed in the immediate—the year-by-year experience of cultural and informational messages, of successive events, of urgent priorities—the abrupt distance afforded by an abstract concept, a more global characterization of the secret affinities between those apparently autonomous and unrelated domains, and of the rhythms and hidden sequences of things we normally remember only in isolation and one by one, is a unique resource, particularly since the history of the preceding few years is always what is least accessible to us. Historical reconstruction, then, the positing of global characterizations and hypotheses, the abstraction from the 'blooming, buzzing confusion' of immediacy, was always a radical intervention in the here-and-now and the promise of resistance to its blind fatalities.

But one must acknowledge the representational problem, if only to separate it out from the other motives at work in the 'war on totality'. If historical abstraction—the notion of a mode of production, or of capitalism, fully as much as of postmodernism—is something not given in immediate experience, then it is pertinent to worry about the potential confusion of this concept with the thing itself, and about the possibility of taking its abstract 'representation' for reality, of 'believing' in the substantive existence of abstract entities such as Society or class. Never mind that worrying about other people's errors generally turns out to mean worrying about the errors of other intellectuals. In the long run there is probably no way of marking a representation so securely as representation that such optical illusions are permanently forestalled, any more than there is a way to ensure the resistance of a materialistic thought to idealistic recuperations, or to ward off the reading of a deconstructive formulation in meta-physical terms. Permanent revolution in intellectual life and culture means that impossibility, and the necessity for a constant reinvention of precautions against what my tradition calls conceptual reification.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, NLN/Verso, London 1975.

The extraordinary fortunes of the concept of postmodernism are surely a case in point here, calculated to inspire those of us responsible for it with some misgivings: but what is needed is not the drawing of the line and the confession of excess ('dizzy with success', as Stalin once famously put it), but rather the renewal of historical analysis itself, and the tireless reexamination and diagnosis of the political and ideological functionality of the concept, the part it has suddenly come to play today in our imaginary resolutions of our real contradictions.

There is, however, a deeper paradox rehearsed by the periodizing or totalizing abstraction which for the moment bears the name of postmodernism. This lies in the seeming contradiction between the attempt to unify a field and to posit the hidden identities that course through it and the logic of the very impulses of this field, which postmodernist theory itself openly characterizes as a logic of difference or differentiation. If what is historically unique about the postmodern is thus acknowledged as sheer heteronomy and the emergence of random and unrelated subsystems of all kinds, then, or so the argument runs, there has to be something perverse about the effort to grasp it as a unified system in the first place: the effort is, to say the least, strikingly inconsistent with the spirit of postmodernism itself; perhaps, indeed, it can be unmasked as an attempt to 'master' or to 'dominate' the postmodern, to reduce and exclude its play of differences, and even to enforce some new conceptual conformity over its pluralistic subjects? Yet, leaving the gender of the verb out of it, we all do want to 'master' history in whatever ways turn out to be possible: the escape from the nightmare of history, the conquest by human beings of control over the otherwise seemingly blind and natural 'laws' of socio-economic fatality, remains the irreplaceable will of the Marxist heritage, whatever language it may be expressed in. It can therefore not be expected to hold much attraction for people uninterested in seizing control over their own destinies.

### System and Differentiation

But the notion that there is something misguided and contradictory about a unified theory of differentiation also rests on a confusion between levels of abstraction: a system that constitutively produces differences remains a system, nor is the idea of such a system supposed to be in kind 'like' the object it tries to theorize, any more than the concept of dog is supposed to bark or the concept of sugar to taste sweet. It is felt that something precious and existential, something fragile and unique about our own singularity, will be lost irretrievably when we find out that we are just like everybody else: in that case, so be it, and let's know the worst; the objection is the primal form of existentialism (and phenomenology), and it is the emergence of such things and such anxieties that needs to be explained. In any case, objections to the global concept of postmodernism in this sense seem to me to recapitulate, in other terms, the classical objections to the concept of capitalism: something scarcely surprising from the present perspective, which consistently affirms the identity of postmodernism with capitalism itself in its latest systemic mutation. Those objections

turned essentially around one form or another of the following paradox: namely that although the various pre-capitalist modes of production achieved their capacity to reproduce themselves through various forms of solidarity or collective cohesion, the logic of capital is on the contrary a dispersive and atomistic, 'individualistic' one, an anti-society rather than a society, whose systemic structure, let alone its reproduction of itself, remains a mystery and a contradiction in terms. Leaving aside the answer to the conundrum ('the market'), what may be said is that this paradox is the originality of capitalism and that the verbally contradictory formulas we necessarily encounter in defining it point beyond the words to the thing itself (and also give rise to that peculiar new invention, the dialectic). We will have occasion to return to problems of this kind in what follows: suffice it to say all this more crudely by pointing out that the very concept of differentiation (whose most elaborate development we owe to Niklas Luhmann) is itself a systemic one, or, if you prefer, turns the play of differences into a new kind of identity on a more abstract level (it being understood that one must also distinguish between dialectical oppositions and differentiations of this random, dispersive type).

The 'war against totality' has finally its political motivation, which it is the merit of Horne's essay to reveal.<sup>2</sup> Following Lyotard, he makes it clear that the fear of Utopia is in this case our old friend 1984, and that a Utopian and revolutionary politics, correctly associated with totalization and a certain 'concept' of totality, is to be eschewed because it leads fatally to Terror: a notion at least as old as Edmund Burke, but helpfully revived, after innumerable restatements during the Stalin period, by the Cambodian atrocities. Ideologically, this particular revival of Cold War rhetoric and stereotypes, launched in the demarxification of France in the 1970s, turns on a bizarre identification of Stalin's Gulag with Hitler's extermination camps (but see Arno Mayer's remarkable *Why Did the Heavens not Darken?* for a definitive demonstration of the constitutive relationship between the 'final solution' and Hitler's anti-communism<sup>3</sup>); what can be 'post-modern' about these hoary nightmare images, except for the depoliticization to which they invite us, is less clear. The history of the revolutionary convulsions in question can also be appealed to for a very different lesson, namely that violence springs from counterrevolution first and foremost, indeed, that the most effective form of counter-revolution lies precisely in this transmission of violence to the revolutionary process itself. I doubt if the current state of alliance or micro-politics in the advanced countries supports such anxieties and fantasies; they would not, for me at least, constitute grounds for withdrawing support and solidarity from a potential revolution in South Africa, say; finally, this general feeling that the revolutionary, Utopian or totalizing impulse is somehow tainted from the outset and doomed to blood by the very structure of its thoughts does strike one as idealistic, if not finally a replay of doctrines of original sin in their

<sup>2</sup> Haynes Horne, 'Jameson's Strategies of Containment', in *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critiques*, op. cit., pp. 268-300.

<sup>3</sup> Arno J. Mayer, *Why the Heavens Did Not Darken: the 'Final Solution' in History*, New York 1988.

worst religious sense. At the end of this essay I will return to more concrete political issues and considerations.

### The Social Determinants of Thought

Now, however, I want to return to the question of totalizing thought in a different way, interrogating it not for its truth content or validity but rather for its historical conditions of possibility. This is then no longer to philosophize exactly, or if you prefer to philosophize on a *symptomatic* level, in which we step back and estrange our immediate judgments on a given concept ('the most advanced contemporary thinking no longer permits us to deploy concepts of totality or periodization') by way of asking the question about the social determinants that enable or shut down thought. Does the current taboo on totality simply result from philosophical progress and increased self-consciousness? Is it because we have today attained a state of theoretical enlightenment and conceptual sophistication, which permit us to avoid the grosser errors and blunders of the old-fashioned thinkers of the past (most notably Hegel)? That may be so, but it would also require some kind of historical explanation (in which the invention of 'materialism' would surely have to intervene). This hybris of the present and of the living can be avoided by posing the issue in a somewhat different way: namely, why it is that 'concepts of totality' have seemed necessary and unavoidable at certain historical moments, and on the contrary noxious and unthinkable at others. This is an inquiry which, working its way back on the outside of our own thought and on the basis of what we can no longer (or not yet) think, cannot be philosophical in any positive sense (although Adorno attempted, in *Negative Dialectics*, to turn it into a genuine philosophy of a new kind); it would certainly lead us to the intensified sense that ours is a time of nominalism in a variety of senses (from culture to philosophical thought). Such nominalism would probably turn out to have several pre-histories or overdeterminations: the moment of existentialism, for instance, in which some new social sense of the isolated individual (and of the horror of demography, or of sheer number or multiplicity, particularly in Sartre) causes the older traditional 'universals' to pale and lose their conceptual force and persuasiveness; the age-old tradition of Anglo-American empiricism as well, which emerges from this death of the concept with renewed force in a paradoxically 'theoretical' and hyper-intellectual age. There is of course a sense in which the slogan 'postmodernism' means all this too; but then in that case it is not the explanation, but what remains to be explained.

Speculation and hypothetical analysis of this kind that bears on the weakening of general or universalizing concepts in the present is the correlative of an operation that can often look more reliable, namely the analysis of moments in the past when such conceptuality seemed possible; indeed, those moments in which the emergence of general concepts can be observed have often seemed to be historically privileged ones. As far as the concept of totality is concerned, I am tempted to say about it what I once said about Althusser's notion of structure, namely that the crucial point to be made is this: we can acknowledge

the presence of such a concept, provided we understand that there is only one of them: something otherwise often known as a 'mode of production'. Althusserian 'structure' is that, and so is 'totality', at least as I use it. As for 'totalizing' processes, that often means little more than the making of connections between various phenomena: thus, to take an influential contemporary example, although Gayatri Spivak offers her conception of a 'continuous sign-chain' as an alternative to dialectical thought,<sup>4</sup> on my usage that conception would also stand as a specific (and non-dialectical) form of 'totalizing'.

We must be grateful to the work of Ronald L. Meek for the prehistory of the concept of a 'mode of production' (as that will later be worked out in the writings of Morgan and Marx), which in the 18th century takes the form of what he calls the 'four stages theory'.<sup>5</sup> This theory comes together in the mid-18th century, in France and in the Scottish Enlightenment, as the proposition that human cultures historically vary with their material or productive basis, which knows four essential transformations: hunting and gathering, pastoralism, agriculture, and commerce. What will then happen to this historical narrative, above all in the thought and work of Adam Smith, is that, having now produced that object of study which is the specifically contemporary mode of production, or capitalism, the historical scaffolding of the pre-capitalist stages tends to fall away and lend both Smith's and Marx's model of capitalism a synchronic appearance. But Meek wants to argue that the historical narrative was essential to the very possibility of thinking capitalism as a system, synchronic or not;<sup>6</sup> and something like that will remain my own position with respect to that 'stage' or moment of capitalism which projects the cultural logic of what some of us now seem to be calling 'post-modernism'.

I am here however essentially concerned with the conditions of possibility of the concept of a 'mode of production', that is to say, the characteristics of the historical and social situation which make it possible to articulate and formulate such a concept in the first place. I will suggest, in a general way, that thinking this particular new thought (or combining older thoughts in this new way) presupposes a particular kind of 'uneven' development, such that distinct and co-existing modes of production are registered together in the life world of the thinker in question. This is how Meek describes the preconditions for the production of this particular concept (in its original forms as a 'four stages theory':

My own feeling is that thinking of the type we are considering which lays primary emphasis on the development of economic techniques and socio-economic relationships, is likely to be a function, first, of the rapidity of contemporary economic advance, and second, of the facility with which a contrast can be observed between areas which are economically advancing and areas which are still in 'lower' stages of development. In the 1750s and

---

<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York 1987, p. 198.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge 1976.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 219-21.

60s, in cities like Glasgow and in areas such as the more advanced provinces in the north of France, the whole social life of the communities concerned was being rapidly and visibly transformed, and it was fairly obvious that this was happening as a result of profound changes taking place in economic techniques and basic socio-economic relationships. And the new forms of economic organization which were emerging could be fairly easily compared and contrasted with the older forms of organization which still existed, say, in the Scottish Highlands, or in the remainder of France—or among the Indian tribes in America. If changes in the mode of subsistence were playing such an important and 'progressive' role in the development of contemporary society, it seemed a fair bet that they must also have done so in that of past society.<sup>7</sup>

### Historical Paradigms

This possibility of thinking the new concept of a mode of production for the first time is sometimes loosely described as one of the newly emergent forms of historical consciousness, or historicity. It is not necessary, however, to have recourse to the philosophical discourse of consciousness as such, since what are being described might equally well be termed new discursive paradigms, and this more contemporary way of talking about conceptual emergence is reinforced, for literary people, by the presence alongside this one of yet another new historical paradigm in the novels of Sir Walter Scott (as Lukács interprets them in *The Historical Novel*).<sup>8</sup> The unevenness that allowed French thinkers (Turgot, but also Rousseau himself) to conceptualize a 'mode of production' probably had as much as anything else to do with the pre-revolutionary situation in the France of that period, in which feudal forms stood out ever more starkly in their distinctive difference against a whole newly emergent bourgeois culture and class consciousness.

Scotland is in many ways a more complex and interesting case, for, as last of the emergent First World countries, or first of the Third World ones (to use Tom Nairn's provocative idea, in *The Break-up of Britain*), Enlightenment Scotland is above all the space of a coexistence of radically distinct zones of production and culture: the archaic economy of the Highlanders and their clan system, the new agricultural exploitation of the Lowlands, the commercial vigour of the English 'partner' over the border, on the eve of its industrial 'take-off'. The brilliance of Edinburgh is therefore not a matter of Gaelic genetic material, but rather owing to the strategic yet eccentric position of the Scottish metropolis and intellectuals with respect to this virtually synchronic coexistence of distinct modes of production, which it is now uniquely the task of the Scottish Enlightenment to 'think' or to conceptualize. Nor is this merely an economic matter: Scott, like Faulkner later on, inherits a social and historical raw material, a popular memory, in which the fiercest revolutions and civil and religious wars now inscribe the coexistence of modes of production in vivid narrative form. The condition of thinking a new reality and articulating a new paradigm for it therefore seem to demand a peculiar conjuncture and

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp. 127–28.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, Lincoln, Nebraska 1983.

a certain strategic distance from that new reality, which tends to overwhelm those immersed in it (this would be something like an epistemological variant of the well-known 'outsider' principle in scientific discovery).

All of which, however, has another secondary consequence of greater significance to us here and which bears on the gradual repression of such conceptuality. If the postmodern moment, as the cultural logic of an enlarged third stage of classical capitalism, is in many ways a purer and more homogeneous expression of this last, from which many of the hitherto surviving enclaves of socio-economic difference have been effaced (by way of their colonization and absorption by the commodity form), then it makes sense to suggest that the waning of our sense of history, and more particularly our resistance to globalizing or totalizing concepts like that of the mode of production itself, are a function of precisely that universalization of capitalism. Where everything is henceforth systemic the very notion of a system seems to lose its reason for being, returning only by way of a 'return of the repressed' in the more nightmarish forms of the 'total system' fantasized by Weber or Foucault or the 1984 people.

But a mode of production is not a 'total system' in that forbidding sense, and includes a variety of counterforces and new tendencies within itself, of 'residual' as well as 'emergent' forces, which it must attempt to manage or control (Gramsci's conception of hegemony): were those heterogeneous forces not endowed with an effectivity of their own, the hegemonic project would be unnecessary. Thus, differences are presupposed by the model, something which should be sharply distinguished from another feature which complicates this one, namely that capitalism also produces differences or differentiation as a function of its own internal logic. Finally, to recall our initial discussion of representation, it is also clear that there is a *difference* between the concept and the thing, between this global and abstract model and our own individual social experience, from which it is meant to afford some explanatory difference but which it is scarcely designed to 'replace'.

A number of other reminders about the 'proper use' of the mode of production model are probably also advisable: that what is called a 'mode of production' is not a productionist model, it always seems worth saying. What also seems worth saying, in the present context, is that it involves a variety of levels (or orders of abstraction) which must be respected, if these discussions are not to degenerate into random shouting matches. I proposed a very general picture of such levels in *The Political Unconscious*, and in particular the distinctions that have to be respected between an examination of historical events, an evocation of larger class and ideological conflicts and traditions, and an attention to impersonal socio-economic patterning systems (of which the well-known thematics of reification and commodification are examples). The question of agency, which arises often in these pages, has to be mapped across these levels.

## The Place of Cultural Production

Featherstone, for example, thinks that 'postmodernism' on my use is a specifically cultural category:<sup>9</sup> it is not, and was rather for better and for worse designed to name a 'mode of production' in which cultural production finds a specific functional place, and whose symptomatology is in my work mainly drawn from culture (this is no doubt the source of the confusion). He therefore advises me to pay closer attention to the artists themselves and to their publics, as well as to the institutions which mediate and govern this newer kind of production: nor can I see why any of those topics should be excluded, they are very interesting matters indeed. But it is hard to see how sociological inquiry at that level would become *explanatory*: rather, the phenomena he is concerned with tend at once to reform into their own semi-autonomous sociological level, one which then at once requires a diachronic narrative. To say what the art market is now, and the status of the artist or the consumer, means saying what it was before this transformation, and even at some outside limit leaving a space open for some alternate configuration of such activities (as is the case, for example, in Cuba, where the art market, galleries, investments in painting, etc., do not exist). Once you have written up that narrative, that series of local changes, then the whole thing gets added into the dossier as yet another space in which something like the postmodern 'great transformation' can be read.

Indeed, although with Featherstone's proposals concrete social agents seem to make their appearance (postmodernists are then those artists or musicians, those gallery or museum officials or record company executives, those specific bourgeois or youth or working class consumers), here too the requirement of differentiating levels of abstraction must be maintained. For one can also plausibly assert that 'postmodernism' as an ethos and a 'life style' (truly a contemptible expression that one) is the expression of the 'consciousness' of a whole new class fraction that largely transcends the limits of the groups enumerated above: this larger and more abstract category has variously been labelled as a new petty bourgeoisie, a professional-managerial class, or more succinctly as 'the yuppies' (each of these expressions smuggling in a little surplus of concrete social representation along with itself).<sup>10</sup>

This identification of the class content of postmodern culture does not at all imply that 'yuppies' have become something like a new ruling class or 'a subject of history'—merely that their cultural practices and values, their local ideologies, have articulated a useful dominant ideological and cultural paradigm for this stage of capital. It is indeed often the case that cultural forms prevalent in a particular period are not furnished by the principal agents of the social formation in question (businessmen who no doubt have something better to do with their time, or are driven by psychological and ideological motive

---

<sup>9</sup> Mike Featherstone, 'Postmodernism Cultural Change and Social Practice', in *Postmodernism/Jacques Critique*, op cit, pp. 117–38.

<sup>10</sup> See also Fred Pfeil, 'Makin' Flippy-Floppy: Postmodernism and the Baby-Boom PMC', in *The Year Left 1*, Verso, London 1985.



forces of a different type). What is essential is that the culture-ideology in question articulate the world in the most useful way functionally, or in ways that can be functionally reappropriated. Why a certain class fraction should provide these ideological articulations is a historical question as intriguing as the question of the sudden dominance of a particular writer or a particular style. There can surely be no model or formula given in advance for these historical transactions; just as surely, however, we have not yet worked this out for what is being called postmodernism. Meanwhile, another limitation of my own work on the subject (not mentioned by any of the contributors) now becomes clear, namely that the tactical decision to stage the account in cultural terms has made for a relative absence of any identification of properly postmodern 'ideologies'. Indeed, since I have been particularly interested in the formal matter of what I call some new 'theoretical discourse', and also because the paradoxical combination of global decentralization and small group institutionalization has seemed to me an important feature of the postmodern tendential structure, I have seemed mainly to single out intellectual and social phenomena like 'poststructuralism' and the 'new social movements': thus, against my own deepest political convictions, all the 'enemies' have still seemed to be on the Left, an impression I will try to rectify in what follows.

But what has been said about the class origins of postmodernism has as its consequence the requirement that we now specify another higher (or more abstract and global) kind of agency than any so far enumerated. This is of course multinational capital itself: it may as a process be described as some 'non-human' logic of capital, and I would continue to defend the appropriateness of that language and that kind of description, in its own terms and on its own level. That that seemingly disembodied force is also an ensemble of human agents, trained in specific ways and inventing original local tactics and practices according to the creativities of the human freedom—this is also obvious, from a different perspective, to which one would only wish to add that for the agents of capital also the old dictum holds that 'people make their history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing'. It is within the possibilities of late capitalism that people glimpse 'the main chance', 'go for it', make money, and reorganize firms in new ways (just like artists or generals, ideologists or gallery owners).

What I have tried to show here is that although my account of the postmodern may seem in the eyes of some of its readers and critics to 'lack agency', it can be translated or transcoded into a narrative account in which agents of all sizes and dimensions are at work. The choice between these alternate descriptions—focalizations on distinct levels of abstraction—is a practical rather than a theoretical one. It would however be desirable to link up this account of agency with that other very rich (psychoanalytic) tradition of psychic and ideological 'subject positions'. If it is now objected that the descriptions of agency described above are merely an alternative version of the base-superstructure model—an economic base for postmodernism on the one account, a social or class base on this other—then so be it, provided we understand that 'base and superstructure' is not

really a model, but a starting point and a problem, something as undogmatic as an imperative simultaneously to grasp culture in and for itself, but also in relationship to its outside, its content, its context, and its space of intervention and of effectivity. How one does that, however, is never given in advance. Gross's beautiful adaptation of Benjamin—postmodernism as the 'afterimage' of late capitalism<sup>21</sup>—reminds us not only how wonderfully supple Benjamin was in his formulations of this relationship (elsewhere he says that the 'superstructure' is the *expression* of the 'base', something that also radically modifies our stereotypes), but also how many new paths of exploration the new figure opens up and entails. Afterimages are objective phenomena which are also mirages and pathologies; they dictate attention to optical processes, to the psychology of perception, and also to the dazzling qualities of the object, and so on and so forth. I have proposed a 'model' of postmodernism, which is worth what it's worth and must now take its chances independently; but it is the construction of such a model that is ultimately the fascinating matter, and I hope it will not be taken as a knee-jerk affirmation of 'pluralism' if I say that alternate constructions are desirable and welcome, since the grasping of the present from within is the most problematical task the mind can face.

Most of my commentators and critics do not however propose alternate models of this kind (I have noted that whatever their positions they seem to take the modernism/postmodernism distinction as a given and as a meaningful category); but they do quite properly feel the need to judge my construction pragmatically, that is to say, in terms of its political consequences, which include consequences for the politics of culture. Thus Shumway's subtle and profound article turns on the positioning of poststructuralism within my scheme of things, although he has a remarkable lesson for me about Ricoeur (which I acknowledge with gratitude):<sup>22</sup> he could not be aware how close I am to him on the significance of Gadamer (since my work on *Truth and Method* has not yet been published), any more than Huhn could be in a position to know how much more of his Adorno reading I would be prepared to endorse than he thinks<sup>23</sup> (but here the slippage results from the term 'ideology,' which Adorno uses in a relatively restricted and old-fashioned sense, but which I wish to open up and generalize in ways consonant with a good deal of contemporary thought, whatever the language we decide to use for these matters). If I continue to assert that contemporary theory (that is to say essentially 'poststructuralism,' to be sure) is to be grasped as yet another postmodern phenomenon, bearing a family likeness to my other more cultural exhibits, this is because I am interested in the formal structure of the new 'theoretical discourse', which seems to me radically different from the language and textual operations of what we may call 'traditional philosophy': of course the content of 'theor-

<sup>21</sup> David Gross, 'Marxism and Resistance: Fredric Jameson and the Moment of Postmodernism', in *ibid.*, pp. 96–116.

<sup>22</sup> David Shumway, 'Jameson/Hermeneutics/Postmodernism', in *ibid.*, pp. 172–202.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Huhn, 'The Postmodern Return, with a Vengeance of Subjectivity', in *ibid.*, pp. 249–67.

etical discourse' is determined and modified by the new form (as it could not but be), while the return to an older philosophical discourse today is no optional or simple matter. Nor would I dream of denying Shumway's assertion of the radical political uses of much of post-structuralism (but then the crucial tactical question would be: under what circumstances and to what ends, and for whom?).

### A New Anarchism?

I do tend to feel that something is lost when an emphasis on power and domination tends to obliterate the displacement, which made up the originality of Marxism as such, towards the economic system, the structure of the mode of production, and exploitation as such. Once again, matters of power and domination are articulated on a different level from those systemic ones, and no advances are gained by staging the complementary analyses as an irreconcilable opposition, unless the motive is to produce a new ideology (in the tradition, it bears the time-honoured name of *anarchism*), in which case other kinds of lines are drawn and one argues the matter differently.

Indeed, I suspect that my most vigorous critics here are those who are in one way or another inspired by an anarchist and populist spirit. Thus Featherstone notes my 'acknowledgment' of the emergence in postmodernism, of a more democratic and culturally literate public everywhere in the world today; but he wonders whether I celebrate this development with sufficient enthusiasm, and perhaps he is right to be suspicious. His own remarks about the new unemployment might have inspired different kinds of doubts as to the political role of some new mass culture among people thus radically disempowered. Goldstein meanwhile goes so far as to assert that I 'disavow' 'the "merely" progressive feminist, Afro-American, working-class, or third-world struggles to alter and to expand the traditional canon and literary study's limitation'.<sup>4</sup> Leaving aside the silliness of the verb (what would it mean to 'avow' such things, and who am I to 'disavow' them or to 'avow' them either?), it is presumptuous of Goldstein to read my mind, and to attribute political attitudes to me which I 'disavow' in any case; far from being opposed to the projects he enumerates, I strongly endorse all of them (he seems to have me confused with Lynne Cheney or William Bennett). He is however kind enough to spill the beans in his next sentence: 'As an engaged insider, a feminist, an Afro-American, a working class, or a third-world critic seeks to change and to improve literary institutions in a "progressive" but not a utopian direction. In a reformist manner, such scholars ameliorate the 'ideological' present and do not map the utopian future; they critique their institution's racist, chauvinist, or elitist discourses, not the irrationality of the whole modern era.'

Here Goldstein is putting words into other people's mouths, I hope as erroneously as he has done with me. This formulation of the old antithesis between reform and revolution does indeed strike me as

---

<sup>4</sup> Philip Goldstein, 'The Politics of Fredric Jameson's Literary Theory: A Critique', in *ibid.*, pp. 249-67.

disastrous; but there is no need to make it, and Mao Zedong used to talk about 'walking on two legs'. Local struggles and issues are not merely indispensable, they are unavoidable; but as I have tried to say elsewhere, they are effective only so long as they also remain figures or allegories for some larger systemic transformation. Politics has to operate on the micro- and the macro-levels simultaneously; a modest restriction to local reforms within the system seems reasonable, but often proves politically demoralizing.

Radhakrishnan<sup>15</sup> offers me a different kind of lesson in alliance politics, but his example of the Rainbow coalition is singularly inappropriate, since Jackson's force and appeal has always consisted in a mediatory opposition which some might even think of as a kind of totalization: I have indeed never heard a Jackson speech which did not seek to unite its multiple 'subject-positions' and constituencies by way of the common situation they share as working-class people. The concept of class thus seems alive and well in the very heart of the most promising recent Northamerican left political experiment.

Saul Landau has observed, about our current situation, that there has never been a moment in the history of capitalism when this last enjoyed greater elbow-room and space for manoeuvre: all the threatening forces it generated against itself in the past—labour movements and insurgencies, mass socialist parties, even socialist states themselves—seem today in full disarray when not in one way or another effectively neutralized; for the moment global capital seems able to follow its own nature and inclinations, without the traditional precautions. Here then we have yet another 'definition' of postmodernism, and a useful one indeed, which only an ostrich will wish to accuse of 'pessimism'. This is a transitional period between two stages of capitalism, in which the earlier forms of the economic are in the process of being restructured on a global scale, including the older forms of labour and its traditional organizational institutions and concepts. That a new international proletariat (taking forms we cannot yet imagine) will reemerge from this convulsive upheaval it needs no prophet to predict: we ourselves are still in the trough, however, and no one can say how long we will stay there. This is the sense in which two seemingly rather different conclusions to my historical essays on the current situation (one on the Sixties and one on postmodernism) are in reality identical: in the first, I anticipate the process of proletarianization on a global scale which I have just evoked here; in the second I call for something mysteriously termed 'cognitive mapping' of a new and global type.

But 'cognitive mapping' was in reality nothing but a code word for 'class consciousness' (as Steve Best notes in his shrewd and wide-ranging analysis<sup>16</sup>): only it proposed the need for class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind, while it also inflected the

---

<sup>15</sup> R. Radhakrishnan, 'Poststructuralist Politics: Towards a Theory of Coalition', *ibid.*, pp. 301–32.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Best, 'Jameson, Totality and the Poststructuralist Critique', in *ibid.*, pp. 333–68.

account in the direction of that new spatiality implicit in the post-modern (which Ed Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* now places on the agenda in so eloquent and timely a fashion<sup>17</sup>). I occasionally get just as tired of the slogan of 'postmodernism' as anyone else, but when I am tempted to regret my complicity with it, to deplore its misuses and its notoriety, and to conclude with some reluctance that it raised more problems than it solves, I find myself pausing to wonder whether any other concept can dramatize the issue in quite so effective and economical a fashion. 'We have to name the system': this high point of the Sixties finds an unexpected revival in the postmodernism debate.

---

<sup>17</sup> Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, Verso, London 1989

### Friends of Roger Burbach / CENSA

Roger Burbach is an outstanding solidarity activist and writer who has been in the forefront of opposition to US intervention in Latin America and the Philippines. He is the founder of the Center for the Study of the Americas (CENSA) in Berkeley, and author (with Orlando Nunez) of the award-winning *Fire in the Americas* (Verso/Haymarket 1987).

This spring, while on a working trip to Nicaragua, Roger was seriously injured in an accident which has left him paralysed from the chest down. Hopes are not high that he will ever walk again. Yet throughout his ordeal, Roger has maintained his characteristic courage and sense of humour, expressing his pride in Nicaragua for the medical care it has been able to provide in spite of limited facilities.

None of us knows the full measure of a colleague until a tragedy strikes. Each of us has been inspired by Roger's example and his many contributions. Now that his income sources are suspended, and he is faced with continuing medical bills, we are trying to ensure that CENSA can survive, and that Roger can return to the frontlines where he belongs. Please join with us.

Cheques (tax deductible in the US) should be made out to CENSA, 2288 Fulton, # 103, Berkeley, CA 94704, USA.

Signed: Thomas E. Ambrogi: Institute for Food and  
Development Policy  
Fred Ross: Neighbor-to-Neighbor  
Sandy Close: Pacific News Service  
Mike Davis/Mike Sprinker: Haymarket Service  
(Verso Books)

## NEW TITLES IN POLITICS

### STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVISM

#### An International Handbook

Edited by Philip G. Altbach

Providing a global perspective on student political activism in 29 countries, this reference work features in-depth essays by specialists who bring multidisciplinary insights to student movements, programmes, and motivations, and to the historical, political, social, and educational contexts in which these movements exist.

0-313-26016-8 544 pages £65.95 Winter 1989

### TROTSKY AND DJILAS

#### Critics of Communist Bureaucracy

Michael M. Lustig

In this study, Lustig compares the views of Communism's two most famous disaffected heretics. The author explores their perceptions of Communist bureaucracy, how it functioned and was maintained, and what the consequences of its excesses signify for revolutionary Marxist ideals.

0-313-24777-3 £34.95 Winter 1989

### REVOLUTION IN THE WORLD SYSTEM

Edited by Terry Boswell

Seventy-one of the 168 member nations of the UN were rocked by insurgency during the past decade. This volume consists of entirely original research from a variety of perspectives and disciplines and provides world-systematic, comparative historical and case study analyses of revolutions and the prolonged development of structural dynamics and political processes that give rise to these upheavals.

0-313-26726-X 256 pages £38.95 Autumn 1989



GREENWOOD PRESS, 3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, LONDON WC2E 8LT

## NEW TITLES IN POLITICS

### THE STATE, BUREAUCRACY, AND REVOLUTION IN MODERN IRAN

#### Agrarian Reforms and Regime Politics

Ali Farazmand

Farazmand examines the political and administrative roles of a large public bureaucracy - the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) - in Iran under the Shah during the 1960s and the 1970s. He discusses some of the major impacts of the Revolution of 1978-9 on this bureaucracy.

1989 0-275-92855-1 £35.95

### PEACE

#### Meanings, Politics, Strategies

Edited by Linda Ronnie Forsey

This book takes an interdisciplinary approach to the topic of peace and peace studies, drawing from the fields of history, sociology, political science, psychology, security studies, and military studies. The complex inter-relationship between the personal and structural dimensions of peace are presented, along with the meanings and politics of peace.

Winter 1989 Cloth 0-275-92833-0 £39.95(E) Pb 0-275-92834-9 £12.95(E)

### TERRORISM AND THE STATE

#### A Critique of Domination Through Fear

William D. Perdue

Perdue presents a study of the political economy of terrorism with emphasis on the role of ideological systems in defining and/or distorting political violence.

Winter 1989 0-275-93140-4 £36.95



PRAEGER PUBLISHERS, 3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, LONDON WC2E 8LT

## *The Nazi State: an Exceptional State?*

Any discussion of the character of an 'exceptional' state must presumably begin with a notion of what categorizes a state as 'normal'.\* My own starting assumption is to accept Max Weber's concept of the state: 'an administrative and legal order subject to change by legislation... (claiming) binding authority... over all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction, ... a compulsory organization with a territorial basis... (where) the use of force is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it', and to see this as the basis for the 'normal' state, residing in 'legal' authority executed through a rational-bureaucratic framework.<sup>1</sup> I accept, too, that the ability to sustain such a state would depend upon what Michael Mann has called its 'infrastructural power'—'the capacity of the state to penetrate civil society and implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm'.<sup>2</sup> This is usually well developed in modern capitalist democracies, but where the capacity is weak, or fails, the consequence is the resort to 'despotic power', actions of the state elite undertaken 'without

routine institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups'. A state based upon despotic power, under modern capitalism, can therefore be regarded as an 'exceptional state'. But, useful as Mann's two-dimensional model is, it does not distinguish between types of 'exceptional state'. And theoretically, as well as in actual reality, it seems important to make such a distinction.

Whatever perspective is adopted, the Nazi State was plainly an exceptional type of state. The most superficial, commonsensical notion would suggest that a state which could plunge the world into war and murder six million Jews was no ordinary state. On a more sophisticated, theoretical plane, the exceptionality of the Nazi state has from the earliest days down to the present preoccupied analysts from a variety of Marxist persuasions and has also been a basic premise of most non-Marxist theorizing. The nature, degree and causes of its exceptionality remain, nevertheless, extremely contentious issues. We can distinguish three broad groups of interpretative approaches, which we shall term liberal, Marxist and structuralist (or functionalist). I have explored these approaches elsewhere, and examined their historiography and relative merits in accounting for different aspects of Nazi rule.<sup>3</sup> I will therefore deal only in brief terms with them here, with specific reference to their explanations of the exceptional character of Nazi rule.

Under the rubric of 'liberal' approaches, I am, of course, subsuming a number of interpretations which are often at odds with one another—sometimes quite sharply so—and yet display a common basic framework. One characteristic feature is their paucity of theorizing about the nature of the state, about its relationship to economics, or the autonomy of the political executive. There is generally an implicit assumption that the political sphere in any system enjoys a primacy over economics, that state executive power is autonomous, and that there is normally a clear divide between the public and private domains. In this perspective, the role of leading actors on the political stage develops an extreme significance, so that in the case of the Third Reich, Hitler becomes the central focus of attention, while explanations of the character of Nazi rule revolve around the Führer's intentions, ideological convictions and dictatorial control. Correspondingly, economic developments in the Third Reich are seldom accorded a leading importance, or even systematically explored.

---

\* This is a revised version of a paper presented to the seminar on 'State, Revolution, and Social Development' held in spring 1988 at the Center for Social Theory and Comparative History, UCLA. I am most grateful to the members of the seminar for their stimulating and constructive criticism. This goes above all for Perry Anderson, Michael Mann, Maurice Zeitlin, Günther Roth, Robert Brenner, Jane Caplan, Peter Loewenberg and, not least, Saul Friedlander.

<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Günther Roth and Claus Wittich, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1968, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Mann, 'The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms, and Results', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 25 (1984), pp. 188–90.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, London 1985.



## The Concept of Totalitarianism

Insofar as any theoretical position is adopted, this is almost invariably dependent upon the concept of totalitarianism. Thus Karl-Dietrich Bracher, while consistently and vehemently rejecting the notion of Nazism as a branch of generic fascism, on the grounds that the uniqueness of Nazism lay in the person and ideology of Hitler and that in the end only Hitler's *Weltanschauung* mattered, is nevertheless adamant that techniques of rule point to a basic similarity with the Soviet state.<sup>4</sup> Klaus Hildebrand, who has adopted a similar perspective in his numerous writings,<sup>5</sup> has not surprisingly taken a conservative position in the recent *Historikerstreit*, emphasizing the merits of comparisons between Nazism and Bolshevism.<sup>6</sup> From a different starting-point, that of a biography of Hitler (in which economic matters scarcely figured at all), Joachim Fest has also advanced the virtues of a conservative totalitarianism position in the *Historikerstreit*.<sup>7</sup> The linkage of the Hitlerite specificity of Nazism to totalitarianism theory amounts, in our context, to saying that the singularity of the Nazi State can be attributed to the ideology of its leader and the policies which flowed from that, while its exceptionality was that of a species of state called 'totalitarian' and distinguishable in its instruments of rule by features which also characterized the Soviet Union, particularly under Stalin.

The limitations of this cluster of approaches seem self-evident. The pronounced Hitler-centrism means a level of autonomy for the factor of personality which either reduces any non-personal components of an explanation to supernumerary significance, or at best elevates the realm of ideology to a plane wholly detached from socio-economic forces and operating as a complete independent variable. As soon as one begins to question, as empirical evidence allows one to do,<sup>8</sup> whether the personalized ideological vision of Hitler adequately accounts for the appeal of Nazism or the motivation of its mass following in the period of its astounding growth and consolidation of power, the explanatory weakness of the personality-based liberal interpretation is exposed. This seems evident even if one accepts the bald assertion of the primacy of politics, and the consequent ignoring or playing down of economic and social factors.

The weaknesses and severe limitations of the totalitarianism concept

---

<sup>4</sup> Karl-Dietrich Bracher, 'The Role of Hitler: Perspectives of Interpretation', in Walter Laqueur, ed., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, Harmondsworth 1979, p. 201, and his *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen*, Munich 1976, Pt. 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Klaus Hildebrand, *The Third Reich*, London 1984, pp. 108-9, 112-23.

<sup>6</sup> 'Historikerstreit'. *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, Munich 1987, pp. 84-92, 281-92.

<sup>7</sup> Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler*, London 1974; 'Historikerstreit', pp. 100-12, 388-90. As is well known, this bitter controversy was unleashed by Ernst Nolte's relativization of the Holocaust as comparable with and, in fact, derivative from Bolshevik terror. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-35, 39-47, 93-4. On the development of Nolte's position see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Die Entstehung der deutschen Geschichte. Ein polemischer Essay zum 'Historikerstreit'*, Munich 1988, pp. 13-19.

<sup>8</sup> The evidence relating to the 'Jewish Question' is summarized in Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans, and the Jewish Question*, Princeton 1984, ch. 2.

—for it is a concept, and not a theory—have been frequently outlined, and need no great emphasis here. Dependent as it is upon a description of alleged common features and techniques of rule, it neither provides a workable theory about the construction of states, nor differentiates between quite different socio-economic systems, functions and aims. It should be added that the concept is unusual in political science typologization in attempting to lump together systems which, in their self-image, were wholly antagonistic towards each other rather than regarding themselves as part of a wider 'family', as, for example, liberal democracies.

In contrast to these approaches, some Marxist analyses appear to offer far greater insights into the exceptional character of the Nazi state, although a number of significant weaknesses of a different kind are perceptible. Traditional Marxist-Leninist approaches, derived from inter-war Comintern theorists and still current especially in the writings of East German historians, remain, whatever nuances and qualifications have been introduced in recent scholarship, far too reductionist to be convincing.<sup>9</sup> Portraying the Nazi state as the most extreme terroristic dictatorship of finance capital, with Hitler as the vehicle of capitalist interests, they have evident difficulty in explaining the priority given by the middle of the war at the latest to irrational ideological goals, particularly the extermination of the Jews. Similarly, the downplaying of Hitler's role and of the personality cult built up around him is part of a general reluctance to concede any notable level of autonomy to aims and policies of the Nazi executive. In all these respects, the Marxist variants deriving from models of Bonapartism, or from Gramsci's theories of the state, are considerably more valuable for our present discussion.

The unorthodox (or deviant) Marxist analyses of Leon Trotsky, Otto Bauer and, especially, August Thalheimer, each drawing differently shaded analogies between fascism and Bonapartism, as developed in Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, are impressive—not least given the sterility and mistakes of orthodox Communism at the time—in their intellectual attempts to grasp the nature of the new type of political danger which they faced.<sup>10</sup> In recognizing the role of the political 'outsider' in a context of stalemate in the class struggle, in grasping the autonomy of the fascist mass party (as opposed to seeing it as purely the creation of big capital), and, above all, in drawing the distinction emphasized by Marx between social and political power, these theories marked a significant advance on other attempts to comprehend the fascist takeover. The autonomy accorded to the fascist executive was least in the approach of Trotsky, who saw the crushing of the SA leadership in

<sup>9</sup> A good anthology of recent East German work can be found in Dietrich Eichholtz and Kurt Gossweiler, *Faschismusforschung Positionen, Probleme, Perspektiven*, (East) Berlin 1980. And see Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective. The East German Approach*, Detroit 1983, ch. 8.

<sup>10</sup> See the excellent analysis in David Beetham, *Marxists in Face of Fascism*, Manchester 1983, pp. 25–39, see also *Journal of Modern History*, II (1976), essays by Jost Dulffer, 'Bonapartism, Fascism, and National Socialism'; Gerhard Botz, 'Austro-Marxist Interpretations of Fascism'; and Robert S. Wistrich, 'Leon Trotsky's Theory of Fascism'.

1934 as the effective end of the mass base of the Nazi movement and as a turn to increasing reliance on big capital. At the other end of the spectrum, the Bonapartist autonomy is at its greatest in some of Bauer's writings.<sup>11</sup> The exceptionality of the Nazi state in such versions rested on the crisis of capital in a particular conjuncture of the class struggle where, temporarily, capital and labour were in a position of equilibrium, and where, therefore, a third force, eased into power by capitalist interests, could develop a high degree of autonomy from those interests. As the writings of Thalheimer et al. were rediscovered by Marxist theorists of fascism in the 1960s, the 'Bonapartist' type of approach gained wider currency and has subsequently been influential in some of the best theoretical writings on the Nazi state.

### Gramsci's Legacy

The Marxist 'renaissance' after the late 1960s also reawakened interest in Gramsci's writings on fascism, which have unfolded an extensive influence.<sup>12</sup> Not the least merit of his analysis lay in its further break with economism to consider not just the crisis of capitalism but the general crisis of the state itself—which, of course, he analysed in terms of the crisis of control, or hegemony, by the dominant classes. A further significant feature was Gramsci's inclusion of 'Caesarism' as the expression of 'the particular solution in which a great personality'—or 'charismatic leader', as he elsewhere described him—is entrusted with the task of "arbitration" over a historico-political situation characterized by an equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe.<sup>13</sup> Present in the Bonapartist model, the 'Caesarism' component was here more explicitly developed.

Gramsci's interpretation, though amended in a number of important ways, formed the essential base of the most thorough analysis to date of fascism as an 'exceptional' capitalist state, that contained in the work of Nicos Poulantzas. This has been subjected to an excellent and thorough critique by Jane Caplan, demonstrating serious weaknesses in his historical understanding which cast doubt on his theoretical propositions.<sup>14</sup> His theory of the 'exceptional' state nevertheless needs to be briefly outlined here.

In his development of Gramsci's theory, Poulantzas identified the precise function of the fascist state as mediating a reestablishment of the political domination and hegemony of the ruling groups threatened in the general crisis.<sup>15</sup> However, in an explicit rejection of Gramsci's notion of an 'equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe', Poulantzas analysed fascism as the vehicle of the bourgeoisie's offensive after a preceding defeat of the working class. While accepting

<sup>11</sup> See Beetham, pp. 28, 35–6.

<sup>12</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, London 1974.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London 1971, pp. 211, 219.

<sup>14</sup> Jane Caplan, 'Theories of Fascism: Nicos Poulantzas as Historian', *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (1977), pp. 83–100.

<sup>15</sup> Poulantzas, p. 86.

that state power always enjoyed a relative autonomy from the economic sphere, and that this was extended temporarily to an exceptional level under fascism, Poulantzas insisted that the fascist state did not succeed in increasing its own independence from capital—let alone establishing a primacy of politics—but merely reorganized the dominance of monopoly capital. Once this was achieved, relatively quickly, the fascist state did not act as the mere agent of big capital or place itself under its orders. But it did 'conduct a policy which [was], in the last analysis, overwhelmingly in the *long-term* interests of this (hegemonic) fraction' of the power bloc.<sup>66</sup> For Poulantzas, then, fascism in power—in this case the Nazi state—amounted to the most extreme form of exceptional capitalist state, being distinguishable from Bonapartism and military dictatorship by the specific character of the class struggle, relations of production, and the particular form of the political crisis.<sup>67</sup> Its relative autonomy from big capital, which rested on its indispensable role in temporarily reconciling the fractions and internal contradictions of the power bloc, evidently set the fascist state apart from 'normal' forms of capitalist state. Yet this autonomy was both different from and less extensive than 'Bonapartist' relative autonomy arising from an equilibrium of the two main social forces. The exceptionality of the fascist state was thus distinguished not by the extent of its intervention in the economic sphere, but by the forms it used, the radical changes in the ideological state apparatuses, and their relationship to the repressive apparatus of the state.<sup>68</sup>

Since the general political crisis preceding fascism was also a crisis of the dominant ideology, the exceptional state was, in Poulantzas's account, necessary both to limit by repression the 'distribution' of power through the apparatuses of the 'normal' state, and to legitimize this repression through overt ideological intervention, restriction and control in order to reorganize and reestablish the dominant ideology. This led to the dominance, under stabilized fascism, of the repressive state apparatus and, within that, of the political police.<sup>69</sup> However, Poulantzas never worked out, either theoretically or empirically, how this precisely related to the reestablishment of hegemony of the ruling class. Once stabilization takes place—which, in Poulantzas's treatment, appears to be around 1934 in the German case—the analysis becomes inordinately sketchy. The rest is, as Jane Caplan has noted, both unclear and based on some challengeable *a priori* assumptions.<sup>70</sup>

This same point can be made of most, if not all, Bonapartist and Gramscian interpretations. Their theoretical concern is primarily with the process of takeover of power, and in this respect their approach, particularly the Gramsci model, has much to commend it. (One might add, however, that it becomes more persuasive, the further it moves away from an economist reductionism. To this

<sup>66</sup> Poulantzas, p. 88, and see also pp. 57–64, 83–7.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 59, 63, 85–6.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>70</sup> Caplan, pp. 88ff.

extent, it might even be argued that the specifically Marxist components of the Gramscian analysis are dispensable; that its explanation of the crisis of bourgeois representation closely complements non-Marxist analyses of the 'seizure' of power as arising from a failure of elite politics—in conditions of a terminal legitimization crisis of a system of pluralist politics and interest representation.) But whatever the merits of these variants of Marxist theory in explaining the circumstances of fascist takeover, they seem on far weaker ground in analysing the character and extent of the autonomy of the regime once fascism is installed in power.

### Economics and Politics

Valuable insights here can be gained from Alfred Sohn-Rethel's unique experience, as a Marxist, of the workings of a central agency of big-business interest representation, the *Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftstag*, in the early years of Nazi rule.<sup>21</sup> His understanding of the exceptionality of the Nazi state was that it was a product of the exceptional character of the capitalist crisis. The only way the German bourgeoisie could recover was by returning to a more 'absolute' type of capitalist accumulation, which could only be achieved through the power of the state to bring about a high level of outright repression and 'plunder'—inevitably, therefore, involving war. In this sense, the Nazi ruling executive<sup>22</sup>—and Sohn-Rethel was adamant that Hitler did, indeed, rule—and the capitalist class were bound to each other by the inexorable rules of capitalism itself. Political domination depended upon following the logic of the untrammelled form of 'absolute' capital accumulation and, therefore, the dominance of big capital. The bourgeoisie, for its part, could not renounce the form of political domination which provided it with its opportunity. As Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht allegedly said, the Nazi rulers and economic elites were 'all in the same boat', bound to a process which, once set in train, could not be reversed.<sup>23</sup>

Once more, this analysis has a great deal to commend it. It brings out more effectively than any other account the dialectic between the inexorable course of development of the German economy and the aims of the Nazi leadership, both of which pushed in the same direction. The weakness, once more, is that it remains ultimately an economic account. Though it accords the Nazi leadership a 'relative autonomy', it fails to explore the character and development of this autonomy through any systematic analysis of the changing structure of the Nazi state—a weakness common to the most sophisticated Marxist analyses. Similarly, the normal economic emphasis, and the understandable anxiety to avoid personalistic interpretations, have generally led to a reluctance to engage in any systematic analysis of the role of Hitler and an exaggerated diminution of its significance. Accepting that the role of Hitler poses substantial problems for Marxist analysis, one historian has noted that 'we do not yet have even the

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *The Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism*, 2nd edn. (with Afterword by Jane Caplan), London 1987.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

makings of a Marxist account of the personal power of the fascist leader in the inter-war years'.<sup>24</sup> Correspondingly, the ideological dynamism, much of which appears to have its focal point in Hitler, can only with difficulty be convincingly integrated into an analytical framework centred upon the nature of capitalism and the character of the bourgeois 'ruling class' under fascism. And since even Bonapartist and Gramscian approaches have paid little attention to the base of fascist parties, usually being inclined to write this off either implicitly or explicitly as déclassé petty bourgeois manipulated by fascist propaganda, they can scarcely do justice to the dynamic of social motivation behind popular support for the mass party, and the continued impact that this had on policy once the Nazis had taken power.

Marxist analysis—Poulantzas being a prime example of this in its most refined state—also reveals little interest in the significant shifts within the power-cartel of the Third Reich (though this was a major component of Franz Neumann's brilliant early study),<sup>25</sup> in the changing structure of Nazi rule over the twelve years of the dictatorship, and in the erosion of 'rational' government. Such considerations have, however, been at the core of a number of important, and highly influential, non-Marxist and, in essence, non-theoretical works on the Nazi state which, to distinguish them from interpretations focusing upon Hitler's 'intentions', have come to be dubbed as 'structuralist' or 'functionalist'. Prominent exponents of such positions are Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat.

The chief emphasis in Mommsen's work is the disintegration of ordered government in the Third Reich. His explanation concentrates on two aspects: the absence of consistent and clear planning, leading to a collapse into destructive and ever wilder impulses; and the complicity of the traditional elites in this process. Though Hitler as a person is not important in Mommsen's account,<sup>26</sup> the dynamic element in the disintegration of government is nonetheless located in the 'haphazard style of leadership' which Hitler had evolved within the Party before the 'seizure of power' and subsequently transferred to the governmental machine itself.<sup>27</sup>

Broszat has directed attention to the relationship between the growth of 'Führer absolutism' and the extension of spheres of ideologically directed political power, and also attempted to link this to the social function of Hitler as the integrating element of disparate and contradictory forces in the Third Reich. While not disputing the importance of Hitler's ideology, Broszat again seeks a functional explanation,

<sup>24</sup> Tim Mason, 'Open Questions on Nazism', in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London 1981, p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> Franz Neumann, *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*, London 1942.

<sup>26</sup> He even dubs Hitler 'a weak dictator'. Hans Mommsen, 'Nationalsozialismus', in *Sozialsystem und demokratische Gesellschaft. Eine vergleichende Enzyklopädie*, 7 vols., Freiburg/Vienna, 1966–72, vol. 4, Column 702.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Mommsen, 'Hitlers Stellung im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem', in Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker, eds., *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität*, Stuttgart 1981, pp. 43–72.

seeing *Lebensraum* and anti-semitism as initially 'ideological metaphors', which only gradually became actual reality.<sup>28</sup> Broszat directly shuns a theoretical explanation, and in the very introductory remarks to the German edition of his book on the Nazi state, he comments upon the difficulty of locating the Third Reich, characterized by its structurelessness and amorphous form of government, in any conventional typology of rule.<sup>29</sup> He has little to say explicitly about the position of capital in the Third Reich, and does not attempt in any systematic fashion to theorize about the nature of Hitler's power. Yet his approach, together with that of Mommsen, seems to me to offer the potential for a consideration of the exceptionality of the Nazi state which transcends the rigidity of even the best Marxist analysis.

### The Role of Hitler

In what follows, I shall in some ways build upon, but also qualify, the interpretations advanced by Broszat and Mommsen. The argument I advance derives from a dissatisfaction both with the personalistically 'Hitler-centrist' depictions of the Nazi state, and with economic reductionist and extreme functionalist positions, where Hitler's role practically disappears from view. I do locate the exceptionality of the Nazi state in the exceptional power position of Hitler. Unlike adherents of the 'liberal' group of interpretations, however, I do not place the emphasis upon 'personality' as the key to his personal power. But nor do I reduce his role to that of a mere 'function' of Nazi rule, or regard him as a 'weak dictator'. Hitler's power was real, and immense, not a phantasm. But it was not a static commodity. Under relative constraint until 1938, it thereafter developed a level of autonomy extraordinary in a modern capitalist system, even under conditions of dictatorial rule. The key locus of power was from the beginning Hitler. But it was the elaboration of a system whose legitimation, structure and dynamic drive were founded on a symbolic Führer authority which made possible the increasingly untrammelled, and actual, Führer power—based upon agencies, notably the expanding SS—police coercive apparatus, which were the institutional expression of that power. The role of his symbolic Führer authority was decisive, therefore, in enhancing the scope for the concrete expression of Hitler's personalized power, and thus for the ultimate implementation of ideological objectives which had lain at the centre of his personal *Weltanschauung* since the early 1920s.

Still indispensable as a component of such an explanation is Max Weber's notion of 'charismatic authority'. In contrast to the 'traditional' authority of hereditary rulers or the impersonal bureaucracy of 'legal' authority which characterizes most modern political systems, this denotes a form of political domination founded essentially upon the perceptions—by a 'following' of believers—of heroism, greatness, and a 'calling' in a proclaimed leader. The 'charismatic community'

<sup>28</sup> Martin Broszat, 'Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18 (1970), pp. 392–409; and his *The Hitler State*, London 1981, esp. chs. 8–9, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers*, Munich 1969, p. 9.

of followers is thus bonded together by the personal ties of its beliefs in the leader and his 'mission'. In its pure form, as Max Weber put it, 'charismatic authority has a character specifically foreign to everyday routine structures.' As a consequence, and unlike the other two forms of domination, 'charismatic rule' is inherently unstable, tending to arise in crisis conditions, and is subject to collapse through failure to live up to expectations, or through becoming 'routinized' into a system capable of reproducing itself only through elimination of the pure 'charismatic' essence.<sup>30</sup>

From a Marxist perspective, it has been said that the notion of 'charismatic rule' is difficult to reconcile with the existence of a modern capitalist state.<sup>31</sup> It seems to me, on the contrary, that the nature and function of 'charismatic rule' can quite easily be comprehended within capitalist state systems in crisis, though its incapacity to reproduce itself means that it is bound to remain, for capitalism, a temporary solution. Within Marxist theory, the basis for a full incorporation of the corrosive, anti-systemic and irrational impact of 'charismatic authority' is provided in Gramsci's brief notes on 'Caesarism',<sup>32</sup> unrelated though they necessarily were to empirical findings about the Nazi regime. Max Weber, of course, mainly used warlords, shamans and prophets as illustrations of charisma. But he also hinted at the dangers—specifically in the German context—implicit in 'pure' forms of Caesarist acclamation of a leader whose power rested on mass demagoguery, the faith of the masses, and plebiscitary affirmation.<sup>33</sup>

In an applied sense, 'charisma' has a centrality to fascist movements which differs essentially from its conventional attachment to politicians in parliamentary and Soviet-type systems. It is the fundament of the very leadership type itself, and therefore the pivot of the mass following ('charismatic community') and the political system which is built around it. The attempted transfer of the 'charismatic' movement's ethos to a governmental system, following a successful 'seizure of power', forms a crucial component of an explanation of the exceptionality of the fascist state, as distinct from that of other 'abnormal' forms of political domination under capitalism. The same feature also helps to explain why the fascist state could combine such an unstable power base with an extraordinary dynamism—a dynamism which, because of its innate incompatibility with the legal-rational framework of government that organized capital under 'normal' circumstances demands, could only prove destructive and even, ultimately, self-destructive.

### The Exceptionality of Nazism

It is universally recognized that, within the general *typus* of fascism, Nazism was itself exceptional by virtue of the dynamic force of its ideology, the radicality of its praxis, the force and extent of its

---

<sup>30</sup> Weber, pp. 241-54.

<sup>31</sup> Mason, 'Open Questions', p. 207.

<sup>32</sup> Gramsci, pp. 219-23.

<sup>33</sup> Weber, pp. 1449-53.



repression, and the scale of its destructive capacity. This should be evident in any comparison with Italy, let alone with contemporary partially fascist systems. Max Weber's concept of 'charismatic rule' is valuable in comprehending the character of Hitler's power base within the Nazi Movement, the growing autonomous force of Führer authority within the complex power relations of the Nazi state, and the corrosive impact of Hitler's power when superimposed upon a contradictory form of domination—the legal, bureaucratic framework of the German state apparatus. Nevertheless, in order to explain the singularity (or specific exceptionality) of the Nazi state within the broader exceptionality under capitalism of the fascist state, we need to account for the particular expression, potency and dynamism of the 'charismatic authority' which became associated with Hitler.

In abstract terms, it could be argued that the radicality and potency of a particular form of fascist state is dependent upon the relative strength of 'charismatic authority' within the fascist mass party before the power takeover, and the relative weakness of the traditional dominant classes vis-à-vis the fascist leadership and mass movement in the power-takeover phase. Both elements of the equation, one might continue, vary with the nature, scale and comprehensiveness of the societal and political crisis which fascism is called upon to solve, and with the magnitude of the national trauma which the 'charismatic' leader claims it is his destiny to overcome. In extreme crises, emotional irrationality reaches such a pitch that it is possible to speak of the fascist appeal as that of a 'political religion', promising no less than messianic salvation, attainable only through total destruction of evil—the implacable political, national and/or racial enemy.<sup>34</sup> The greater the perceived social and political divides, dangers and insecurities, and anxieties about the future, the greater the tendency to focus the trauma and the hopes of recovery in the 'mission' of the great Leader. In the context of inter-war Europe, it is not difficult to appreciate both the unusually strong appeal in a number of countries of fascist-type 'charismatic' leaders, and the peculiarities of history and political culture which promoted such a radically messianic vision of national salvation in Germany.

Yet the fascist movement, however charismatic, can gain power only if the traditional elites prove incapable of controlling the mechanisms of rule, and if they are ultimately prepared to help engineer a fascist takeover and collaborate in fascist rule. Subsequently, the more normal process would be for the traditional ruling class to regain its dominance after an initial phase of upheaval. But, exceptionally, the weakness of the traditional ruling class relative to the charismatic leadership of the fascist mass movement means that the autonomy of that leadership expands rather than contracts, and with it the scope for implementation of the central tenets of the 'political religion' which forms the *raison d'être* and action-target of the movement. Instead of restoring their own control, the traditional elites then find

---

<sup>34</sup> On this point, I am grateful to Karl Schleunes for letting me read his, as yet, unpublished paper: 'Nazism as a Political Religion: The Continuing Search for an Interpretation of National Socialism'. See also Robert A. Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, London/Sydney 1986.

themselves outflanked and tend to adopt high-risk policies which place the reproduction of their own continued dominance in jeopardy. Let us now turn from these abstract propositions to a more empirical consideration of the course of Nazism in Germany.

### The Weimar Crisis

The Weimar Republic collapsed in conditions of a quite extraordinary crisis of legitimacy, which coordinated a series of separable destructive tendencies, each alone perhaps survivable, but together fatal.<sup>35</sup> The legitimacy crisis was at once a crisis both of popular politics in a pluralist system, and of elite politics. The low basis of legitimacy which the Republic had enjoyed from the outset, further undermined by the inflation and restabilization crises of the mid-1920s, was completely destroyed in the socio-economic context of the early 1930s, bringing with it a total destabilization of the political system and a vacuum of populist politics and interest representation on the Right. The growing failure of the traditional power elite to control the organization of politics in its own interests—themselves fractured by economic crisis—was reflected in a series of abortive attempts to establish a new authoritarian framework of government, each experiment further undermining the state without providing any obvious substitute, each demonstrating the inability of elites to master the politics of mass mobilization which had become a key feature of the Weimar system. In these circumstances, but only by late 1932, the dominant elements in the various 'fractions' of the German elite eventually came to accept, often with reluctance, that a solution had to include Hitler and the Nazi Party.<sup>36</sup> By this time, of course, the one political force which had the potential to combat Nazism—organized labour—had for years been disastrously split and had long since ceased to play any significant role in determining the struggle for power.

Much of a Bonapartist or Gramscian interpretation is compatible with what has just been described—in particular, Gramsci's own notion of a 'catastrophic equilibrium' of Right and Left.<sup>37</sup> But the emphasis here has been placed less upon some fairly nebulous concept of 'bourgeois hegemony' than upon a more tangible question of the control of the apparatus and organization of politics and the state. The contentious point which divides Poulantzas from Bonapartist approaches—whether the elites were in a weak and defensive position, or, rather, engaged in an offensive—can be answered as follows. The elites were strong in destructive capacity, effectively ensuring that democracy could not survive. But they were weak in constructive power. Without control of mass politics, they were unable to effect any lasting transformation to an authoritarian state system. They were by early 1933 in a strong position vis-à-vis a working class divided

---

<sup>35</sup> The combination of crises is stressed by Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*, Frankfurt-am-Main 1987, and by Richard Bessel in an (as yet) unpublished paper, 'Why Did the Weimar Republic Fail?'.  
<sup>36</sup> See David Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic*, revised 2nd edn., New York 1986.

<sup>37</sup> Gramsci, p. 219.

and demoralized by the Slump,<sup>38</sup> and in this sense on the offensive. Yet their failure to organize politics left them weak and exposed to the force represented by Hitler, who, in this climate, had the great advantage rather than disadvantage of being a complete outsider in the political power game. It has, therefore, to be accepted that Hitler's position on assuming power, though seemingly precarious in many respects, was actually one of strength with regard to the ruling class. Let us now for a moment explore the other side of the collapse of Weimar, the character of support for Nazism.

The deeper the ideological-cultural, socio-economic and political cleavages in a society, so we have conjectured, the greater the propensity to find attractive a visionary message focusing on a national saviour. The more crass the social divides of Weimar Germany, the more appealing became the vision of a unified 'people's community' which Hitler promised to create. The more polarized the ideological divides, the more obvious the need for a complete showdown with the ideological enemy seemed to be. And the weaker the Weimar governments showed themselves to be in mastering the crises, the more glaring was the appeal of strength and force. Finally, to complete the circle, the more weakness could be portrayed as the source of the nation's plight, the greater was the attraction of total unity made possible by the ruthless excision of weak and corrupting entities. The nationalist-racist-imperialist discourse of the radical Right, formed in Imperial Germany and massively embellished by war, defeat and revolution, fused this pot-pourri of prejudice, resentment and hatred into a political faith, with Germany as its god and the Jew (especially in his Bolshevik guise) as the devil. The prophet of this 'religion' and holder of the arcanum was Hitler, his acolytes the early devotees of the Nazi Movement—the basis of the 'charismatic community'. By the early 1930s, this following was extended to millions whose ideological faith was far more lukewarm, but whose widely varied and often incompatible forms of social motivation found their common denominator in a leadership figure offering political salvation.

By the time of the economic crisis, the strain of political messianism long established in the political culture of the radical Right had already come to be attached to Hitler, who had garnered the support of the earlier splintered radical Right and had by 1928 a by no means negligible activist backing of some 100,000 Party members.<sup>39</sup> In the ensuing legitimacy crisis, the impersonal base of functional exercise of power, upon which the modern capitalist state system conventionally rests, came under increasing attack from those who felt they had suffered most from it. There was a violent lurch towards acceptance—already by over thirteen million Germans in 1932—of an entirely different premise of government, based upon the exercise of personal

---

<sup>38</sup> For a recent analysis of the social, as well as the political, divisions of a weakened working class, see Dick Geary, 'Unemployment and Working-Class Solidarity: The German Experience 1929–33', in Richard J. Evans and Dick Geary, eds., *The German Unemployed*, London/Sydney 1987.

<sup>39</sup> Albrecht Tyrell, *Führer befehl! ... Selbstzeugnisse aus der 'Kampfzeit' der NSDAP*, Düsseldorf 1969, p. 352; Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Documents on Nazism*, London 1974, p. 95.

power coupled with personal responsibility.<sup>40</sup> The 'charismatic' movement thus comprised a potential acclamatory base of well over a third of the population drawn—though not in equal proportions—from all classes of society and not just from the petty bourgeoisie, and headed by an enormous, if ramshackle, organization of some 850,000 Party members and a paramilitary force of around 425,000 stormtroopers by the beginning of 1933.<sup>41</sup> To repeat, then, Hitler was in far from the weak position which contemporaries of Left and Right imagined, and which still seems to be implied in many Marxist accounts. Furthermore, the size of Hitler's mass support by 1933 distinguishes his platform for personalized rule not only from that of Bonapartist regimes and military dictatorships, but even from other fascist or quasi-fascist regimes. Hence, one could posit the suggestion that the degree of radicalism unfolded by the fascist state in power stood in direct relationship to the size and dynamism of the fascist mass movement—as the expression of the 'charismatic authority' of its leader—before attaining power. Conversely, the ease and degree of the traditional elites' reassertion of control after the takeover depended on the relative strength or weakness of the fascist mass base in the movement phase. The examples of Germany, Italy and Spain would seem to lend support to this hypothesis.

### The Power Cartel

The alliance of 1933 between the dominant elites and the Nazi leadership can best be conceived, building upon the interpretations of Franz Neumann and Peter Hüttenberger,<sup>42</sup> as an unwritten pact between different, but interdependent, blocs in a 'power-cartel', with strong affinities, but not an identity, of aim and purpose. I have developed elsewhere,<sup>43</sup> and do not want to repeat here, my notion of the gradual but inexorable shifts which took place in the composition of this power-cartel, as the original triad of Nazi Movement-Big Business-Army, fused together by the assault on the Left, restoration of 'order' and profitability, and the pledging of a massive rearmament programme, gradually gave way by 1936 to a quadripartite cartel, now including the greatly enhanced power of the SS-Police executive complex. The added point I would like to emphasize is that the position of Hitler (that is, his 'Führer authority') from the very outset amounted almost to a separate, and potentially dominant, component of this power cartel, and in a number of stages—most notably, the aftermath of the so-called 'Röhm Putsch' and death of Hindenburg in 1934, the march into the Rhineland and establishment of the Four Year Plan in 1936, and the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis of early

<sup>40</sup> See André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, London 1982, pp. 58–9, 62–3.

<sup>41</sup> Noakes and Pridham, *Documents on Nazism*, p. 113; Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers*, London 1983, pp. 6, 32. One estimate puts the number of SA men at the time of Hitler's appointment to the Chancellorship at as many as 700,000, though the source of this estimate is not known. By May 1933, the size of the SA had expanded to over two million stormtroopers. Fischer, pp. 32, 70 note 35.

<sup>42</sup> Neumann, *Bobenath*; Peter Hüttenberger, 'Nationalsozialistische Polykratie', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2 (1976), pp. 417–42.

<sup>43</sup> Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 50ff.

1938—developed a greater degree of autonomy both from the traditional national-conservative elites and from the state apparatus itself.

This elevation of the Führer authority, closely allied to the coercive power of the SS-Police apparatus and the acclamatory potential of the Party and propaganda machines, provided a driving force for the accelerating, and ultimately irrational and untrammelled, dynamic of the Nazi regime, with Hitler's 'heroic' image serving a number of key functions of integration, mobilization and legitimation. The repression of early 1933, terrible though it was—and an assault on the Left would probably have taken place under any form of authoritarian government at that time—might have settled down eventually had the premise of the new state not been the dynamic one of 'charismatic authority', rooted in the visionary goals associated with the person of the Führer. The change in form of state in 1933, which was cemented in August 1934 when Hitler became head of state, was not merely superficial and did not simply amount to the replacement of democracy by an authoritarian system (or even the replacement of one form of authoritarianism under the Presidential Cabinets by another under Hitler). Substance as well as form changed fundamentally. A state which defined its constitutional position in 1934, in the words of the leading legal theorist Ernst Rudolf Huber,<sup>44</sup> as wholly embodied in 'Führer power', which was 'comprehensive and total' and 'not restricted by safeguards and controls . . . but . . . free and independent, exclusive and unlimited', was indeed an exceptional state.

The 'Führer myth'—the heroic and charismatic image of Hitler which underlay 'Führer power'—can lay claim to be the pivot and driving force of the Third Reich.<sup>45</sup> At the popular level, it could find some appeal for almost everyone who had not been schooled before 1933 in the opposing ideological blocs of socialism/communism and political Catholicism—the mass of the non-organized population. The undoubtedly high level of popularity which Hitler derived from his smashing of the Left, the dazzling economic recovery, the run of staggering diplomatic coups, and the renewed strength of German arms and world prestige provided an important integratory element which, as left-wing opposition groups constantly made clear, rendered resistance work not only highly dangerous but also largely ineffective. Particularly at the activist level, the long-range ideological 'visions' of Hitler acted as a crucial mobilizing agent, providing the stimulus for a new release of energy when things were sagging, and a vital sanction or legitimation for the ideological initiatives of others. The Party, the chief vehicle of the 'Führer myth', also assured a base for constantly renewable acclamation, persuading waverers, depressing opponents, and putting pressure upon old-fashioned authoritarians in the regime who, from the mid 1930s, were wanting to rein back and consolidate rather than 'go for broke'. At this third level, that of the non-Nazi elites, despite the fact that Hitler's 'charisma' had been distinctly less

---

<sup>44</sup> Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945*, vol. 2, Exeter 1984, p. 199.

<sup>45</sup> I have explored the following points more fully in my work *The 'Hitler Myth'. Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford 1987.

important than outright power politics in the 'alliance' of 1933, the 'Führer myth' nevertheless played a significant role. On the one hand, there were those—not least in intellectual circles—who were won over to the complete version of the myth. But outside the total devotees, many in the leadership of the state bureaucracy and armed forces were prepared to express admiration for Hitler, whatever their reservations about the rest of the Nazi regime. Even for some of those in elite groups who eventually found their way into fundamental resistance to the regime, this lingering admiration or readiness to exempt Hitler from the general opprobrium made them for long captives of regime policy. On a second plane, the initial and lasting underestimation of the 'Caesaristic' power of Hitler's position—an underestimation common to the Left and the national-conservative Right—inevitably meant that when interests began to clash, the specifically Nazi elite, and above all the quasi-autonomous Führer authority, proved uncontrollable.

### Shifts within the Elites

Of course, throughout much of the 1930s and even down to the middle of the war there was no necessary incompatibility between Nazi aims and those of leading sectors of the dominant elites. One could speak of ideological, strategic and economic interests largely complementing each other and pushing in the same general direction. But this should not conceal the fact that important shifts were taking place within the dominant elites, and that the former 'power elites' were becoming reduced in good measure to purely 'functional elites'. Recent research has shown, for example, that Ruhr mineowners, an important sector of the former reactionary power-house of heavy industry, had become disconcerted about the course of events by the mid-1930s.<sup>46</sup> A new axis, with Göring as link-man, now existed between the Luftwaffe, the Four Year Plan and the chemicals giant IG-Farben—Schacht's demise as economics mastermind being the counterpoint to the changed balance of power. This development, and the corresponding push-pull effect of Nazi policy and economic interests, meant that the ways of retreat were becoming rapidly closed as 'capital and fascism were chained together in a relationship of mutual dependency'.<sup>47</sup> This should not obscure the extent to which the Nazi leadership, by the later 1930s, was calling the tune.

Within the armed forces leadership, too, significant change was taking place, as a new 'functional' elite, closely tied to Hitler, replaced the old-guard representatives such as Beck and Fritsch.<sup>48</sup> By 1938 the die was as good as cast. As the high-risk policy—prompted by the arms race, sharpened international tension, mounting economic problems, in tandem with Nazi ideological expansionist aims—became inescapable, so those who were increasingly concerned at the

---

<sup>46</sup> See John R. Gillingham, *Industry and Politics in the Third Reich*, London 1985.

<sup>47</sup> Sohn-Rethel, p. 138.

<sup>48</sup> Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *The Army, Politics and Society in Germany, 1933–45*, Manchester 1987, pp. 35–41.

dangers became outflanked and impotent. Important shifts in the power structure of the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1939 were, therefore, enhancing the sphere of autonomy accruing to Hitler and furthering the implementation of ideological imperatives bound up in the Führer's 'vision'. The impact of Hitler's 'charismatic authority' upon the structure of government in the Third Reich was the crucial element of this process.

Hitler's approach to government was in many ways remarkably non-interventionist. Access to him, even for government ministers, was difficult, for some impossible. Pinning him down to a clear decision was often a hopeless task. His lack of intervention was a reflection of his darwinistic principle of struggle—letting the stronger in a dispute emerge through competition. It matched his wholly unbureaucratic style, aloofness from all routine administration, and disinterest in legislative niceties. And it was also a direct product of the type of leadership Hitler embodied. To protect his exalted 'charismatic' image, built around national unity, Hitler could not afford to be involved in the day-to-day disputes of divisive politics.

Limited intervention was not, however, a sign of a 'weak dictator'. Nothing of note could be done in the Third Reich without the Führer's approval or against his wishes—though both were often couched in general rather than specific terms. In areas which pre-occupied him, notably foreign policy, his directing hand was plain from the start, and became even more decisive from the mid-1930s onwards.<sup>49</sup> His patchy involvement in anti-Jewish policy during the 1930s was in no small measure tactically conditioned by his unwillingness in those years to be publicly associated with the 'seamy' side of Nazism. Here, too, and in other barbarous areas of racial policy, as policy measures were radicalized and external constraints fell away, Hitler's own personal involvement expanded. And even in economic affairs, in which he seldom intervened, his memorandum of 1936 was decisive in favouring the new course of the Four Year Plan, effectively ruling out internal debate and the alternative strategies touted in high places during the 1935–36 crisis.

Despite all these qualifications, however, the 'Führer state', in its early years especially, operated for the most part without a clear directing hand. Hitler was a focus for policy initiatives more than an agent of policy formulation. The result was that free rein was given to every form of competitive urge, leading less to directed government than to predatory opportunism, self-selection and arbitrary, uncoordinated initiatives—though all of them falling within the parameters of what were regarded as Hitler's visionary ideological goals.<sup>50</sup> This peculiar combination determined both the increasingly autonomous strength of the Führer authority and the progressive radicalization in the spheres most closely related to his own ideological predilections.

---

<sup>49</sup> See Kerahaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, pp. 114–20; and Jost Dülffer, 'Zum "decision-making process" in der deutschen Außenpolitik 1933–1939', in Manfred Funke, ed., *Hitler, Deutschland und die Macht*, Düsseldorf 1978, pp. 186–204.

<sup>50</sup> As one leading Nazi put it, it was a case of 'working towards the Führer'. Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism 1919–1945*, vol. 2, p. 207.

## Remoulding the State

Subjected to the corrosive impact of 'charismatic' authority, parasitically superimposed upon formal governmental structures, the formerly much elevated German State was now seen, like everything else, in purely functional terms as a means to an end—a tool for the furthering of the vague but uncontradictable visions of the Führer, a piece of property to be discarded at will where it did not serve the purpose demanded. Where a task could in Hitler's view be better conducted outside the state apparatus, or was too important to be entrusted to government ministers and the bureaucratic machine, the state was simply bypassed. Powerful new authorities were set in place, dependent upon Hitler alone for their mandate, and either lying outside the state apparatus or forming hybrids with Party and State organizations. Göring's Four-Year-Plan and Himmler's SS-Police empire were the most important of these. A less well-known but striking example of the extraordinary power which could accrue to apparently insignificant officers outside the normal governmental framework was the Führer Chancellery. Set up to deal with petitions to Hitler as well as his personal matters, by 1938–39 it was taking the initiative in the so-called 'euthanasia action' which, under the direction of the Chancellery personnel, brought about the deaths of more than 70,000 incurably and mentally sick persons in Germany by mid-1941.<sup>21</sup>

In foreign affairs, too, different, sometimes competing and contradictory initiatives provided a licence for increasingly hawkish and dangerous impulses. The influence of the amateur diplomat Ribbentrop, who replaced the conservative von Neurath as Foreign Minister in February 1938, is one example.<sup>22</sup> Hitler's diplomatic coups between 1933 and early 1938 had inordinately strengthened his position vis-à-vis the conservative elites in the army and foreign ministry, and those circles—particularly in the Sudeten crisis—found themselves in a minority objecting to the dangers built into a course of external aggression. Moreover, in the light of Hitler's continued successes—cemented by the capitulation of the Western powers in the Munich Agreement—their case became increasingly difficult to make. Now unconstrained by any conservative forces, Hitler's scope and inclination for dangerous gambles in foreign policy were wholly complemented by structural factors: the mounting economic difficulties, and the momentum of the arms race. Once in the war, early victories undermined any lingering internal opposition within the military, and the gambling instinct was given full rein. It was at its most extraordinary and irrational not in the opening of a second front with the invasion of the Soviet Union, which had a strategic and economic rationale as well as purely ideological objectives, but in the reckless and futile declaration of war on the USA in December 1941—for the first time, plainly a loser's throw of the dice.

---

<sup>21</sup> See Jeremy Noakes, 'Philipp Bouhler und die Kanzler des Führers der NSDAP: Beispiel einer Sonderverwaltung im Dritten Reich', in Dieter Rebentisch and Karl Teppe, eds., *Verwaltung contra Massenvernichtung im Staat Hitlers*, Göttingen 1986, pp. 208–36.

<sup>22</sup> See Wolfgang Michalka, *Ribbentrop und die deutsche Weltpolitik 1933–1940*, Munich 1980.



In anti-Jewish policy, too, there was fragmentation of policy formulation before 1938, encouraged by the paucity of central policy directives and coordination, and by the range of competing authorities with an interest in finding a 'solution to the Jewish Question'.<sup>33</sup> Here, par excellence, was the room for private initiatives to force the pace of radicalization. The goal was established by the Führer's known wish to remove Jews from Germany, but the path to the goal was left wholly unclear. This in itself provided the framework for radicalization from below, sanctioned from above. Hitler set the tone while others forced the pace. Within the 'power cartel' of the Third Reich, the SS-Police apparatus, which had greatly expanded its power base, had a *raison d'être* in the fulfilment of Hitler's ideological goals, a central interest in the 'Jewish Question', and an administrative machinery in Eichmann's office to organize a 'solution to the Jewish Question'. Its pivotal position as the regime's 'problem-solving agency', established through the crushing of internal opposition, was now extended to provide a solution to the 'Jewish Question' over which, in November 1938, it acquired decisive control. Moreover, the power groups in industry, the state bureaucracy and the army were themselves deeply and increasingly implicated in anti-Jewish policies. Even where they did not force the pace, the discriminatory policies of the regime were not incompatible with the interests of these groups until well into the war, by which time the central component of Nazi ideology and the one closest to Hitler's own obsessions had taken concrete shape as the 'Final Solution'. The irrationality of the ideologically motivated extermination of the Jews can only be comprehended in terms of the progressive undermining of ordered government, attuned to rational objectives, by the readiness to work towards the visionary goals of a 'charismatic leader' freed from institutional constraints.

The affinities between non-Nazi elites and the Nazi leadership did not seriously start to break down until the final phases of the war, when defeat was looming and the increasing arbitrariness and irrationality of the regime's leadership was seen to be counter-productive to the continuance of the social power of the traditional elites. Even now, many had 'burnt their boats' and were bound to Hitler and the regime through their own active complicity in the conduct of a barbarous, genocidal war. Additionally, the war had greatly extended the number of those who had benefited materially from the Third Reich. State property was now carved up like medieval feudal possessions, and was handed out to private individuals—not just Party satraps but also Field Marshals in the Wehrmacht<sup>34</sup>—as war booty or bribes to retain their loyalty.

<sup>33</sup> See esp. Karl A. Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz*, Urbana/Chicago/London 1970; and Uwe Dietrich Adam, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf 1972. David Bankier's recent article, 'Hitler and the Policy-Making Process on the Jewish Question', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3 (1988) has established that Hitler played a more active role in decision-making in the 'Jewish Question' during the 1930s than had hitherto been presumed, though his interventions were normally reactions to the initiatives of others and, though encouraging a relentless radicalization, did not add up to a consistent and clear policy—as opposed to a goal to be aimed at, that of ridding Germany of Jews.

<sup>34</sup> See the substantial 'donations' to Keitel, Guderian, von Leeb and von Reichenau in: Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R43II/1087a; and for Hitler's reasoned policy of bribery to retain loyalty, Hildegard von Kotze, ed., *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938–43. Aufzeichnungen des Majors Engel*, Stuttgart 1974, pp. 85–86.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the exceptionality of the Nazi state lay not only in the conditions which allowed an 'outsider' such as Hitler, fronting an unusual political force, to come to power, but also in the extraordinary character, in a modern capitalist state, of the type of power he exercised. This gradually culminated in the dominance of purely ideological goals which ultimately ran counter to the reproduction of the socio-economic order and, indeed, of the political system itself. Not only destruction on the grand scale, but self-destruction was arguably immanent to the Nazi 'system' of rule.

The peculiar type of power which Hitler represented was a product of one strain of German bourgeois political culture which attained a disproportionate significance, hauling it from the fringes to the epicentre of political life, in the conjunctural circumstances of a multi-dimensional crisis of the Weimar state. For a minority—though a sizeable and increasing one—the cumulative crises since 1918 had amounted to such a traumatic experience that it rejected the 'legal rational' state and its associated forms of politics in favour of the salvation which a 'political religion' and its missionary leader could bring. Given the bitter nature of ideological divisions within Weimar Germany, the level of conflict of highly advanced modernity and archaic social values, and the collapse of the much-vaunted nationalist and imperialist ambitions, it is not surprising that the 'political religion' was seen as a fundamentalist all-out fight to the finish of 'good' against 'evil', in which the 'charismatic community' was prepared to subject itself totally to the 'guiding spirit' of its leader. The faith of the devotees was not enough to bring Hitler to power. But it was a factor of vital importance in 'working towards the Führer' during the Third Reich itself.

Neither a major economic crisis nor chronic government instability would of themselves have necessarily been sufficient to terminate the Weimar democracy. But the massive legitimization crisis, reflected in the paralysis and undermining of a pluralistic parliamentary system, and the parallel crisis of elite politics, willing and able to destroy parliamentary rule but unable to construct a viable alternative mass basis for authoritarian rule, offered the 'political space' within which Nazism could become a desirable weapon of the elite offensive against the Left.<sup>33</sup> The need for conflict resolution through repression of the 'enemies of the state', combined with a hyping-up of 'national unity', gave Hitler an important lever in the power struggles at the end of 1932 and beginning of 1933. The failure of alternative elite strategies explains the extraordinary room for manoeuvre which had already accrued to the camarilla around Reich President Hindenburg, especially to the maverick von Papen, which played the decisive role in installing Hitler in power on 30 January 1933. An alternative in the form of a military dictatorship, which would have undoubtedly

---

<sup>33</sup> For the concept of 'political space', see Juan J. Linz, 'Political Space and Fascism as a Late-Comer', in Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet and Jan Petter Myklebust, eds., *Who Were the Fascists?*, Bergen/Oslo/Tromsø 1980.

carried out reactionary and repressive policies but would have avoided the worst solution—a Hitler government—was possible down to the very moment of Hitler's appointment.

Coming to power in these conditions, the new type of political leadership embodied by Hitler offered the elites a vehicle for apparent resolution of the crisis and reassertion of their basis of social power. The acceptance by the elites of the new-style leadership, on the other hand, gave Hitler the initiative in the 'power-cartel'. Most of the trump cards were in his hands—even if it did not appear to be the case when the Chancellorship was bestowed upon him. Hitler's massive popularity, which he could always kindle through a new spectacular 'success', was a major source of strength. Another was the fragmentation of government and the building of crucially important power complexes closely dependent upon the authority of Hitler and bound to the furthering of his perceived ideological goals. Gradually but inexorably, therefore, the 'normative' state succumbed to the inroads made upon it by executive measures associated with the vision of the 'charismatic' Leader.<sup>36</sup> This superimposition of irrational 'charismatic authority' upon a modern, advanced, bureaucratic form of state reached its apogée in the conveyor-belt mass murder of the Jews.

Had Hindenburg entrusted power in January 1933 not to Hitler but to a military dictatorship, and had such a regime lasted in power (which is intrinsically doubtful), a revisionist foreign policy and some form of racial discrimination, particularly against the Jews, would almost certainly have been implemented. But with anyone other than Hitler at the head of the German government, the chances of general European war would have been greatly diminished. And without Hitler, it is scarcely conceivable that anti-Jewish discrimination would have led to the murder of millions in the 'Final Solution'. This speculation is meant, of course, not to personalize 'guilt' in Hitler, but to suggest that the exceptionality of the Nazi state cannot be separated from the exceptionality of its leader figure. However, that exceptionality resided less in the fact that Hitler was an extraordinary and bizarre individual, than in the distinctive form of political authority which he embodied and in its corrosive impact upon the most economically and culturally advanced state in Europe.

---

<sup>36</sup> For the dualism of the 'normative' and 'executive' state, see Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State*, New York 1941.

## **Marxism and the Great French Revolution**

by Paul McGarr, Alex Callinicos and John Rees

A Marxist analysis of the French Revolution of 1789, with particular attention to its intellectual background in the writings of Hegel, and the historical debate between left and right about the nature of bourgeois revolutions. This is a special bi-centenary issue of International Socialism journal.

192 pages. £2.50 / US\$4.50

## **Towards October: Trotsky 1879-1917**

by Tony Cliff

A new biography of Trotsky, covering the formative years of the 1905 revolution, the genesis of the theory of permanent revolution, and his role as organiser of the October 1917 insurrection—with special attention to Trotsky's political weakness in handling the Bolshevik-Menshevik split of 1903

320 pages. £6.95 / US\$11.95

## **Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front**

by Leon Trotsky

Few confrontations between right and left have had such consequences as that in Germany in the 1930s. The Nazi victory was a defeat for the working class of undreamt-of magnitude. Yet it was avoidable. Trotsky's understanding of the class forces involved in this confrontation was, and remains, unparalleled.

A Bookmarks Revolutionary Classic. 272 pages. £4.95 / US\$9.50



**NEW  
TTTLES  
Summer  
1989**

## **The Bookmarx Club**

Our quarterly book club offers the best of new socialist publications to members at discount prices. The new summer list is just out. Write now for a free copy.

All titles are available from good bookshops; also by mail order (please add 60p / \$1.00 per title for postage) from:

### **Bookmarks London**

265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE, England. Phone 01-802 6145.

### **Bookmarks Chicago**

PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616, USA. Phone 312-666-7337.

# NEW BOOKS FOR NEW TIMES

## FROM LAWRENCE & WISHART

With recent conferences, 'Changing Identities' (1989) and 'Back To The Future' (1988), and a growing profile of exciting new books, Lawrence & Wishart aims to reflect in its publishing the current debates and concerns about the 'New Times'

### New Times

#### The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s

Stuart Hall & Martin Jacques (eds)  
(in association with *Marxism Today*)

This new collection brings together the best of the past year's agenda-setting essays from *Marxism Today*, with a new introduction from the co-editors whose previous collection *The Politics of Thatcherism* consolidated *Marxism Today*'s pioneering analysis of Thatcherism. As Hugo Young wrote in the *Guardian*, '*Marxism Today* offers the most coherent and stimulating effort I've yet come across to grapple, from a left-of-centre position, with the "New Times" in which we live'

**Contributors include:** Sarah Benton, Jon Bloomfield, Rosalind Brunt, Stuart Hall, Charlie Leadbeater, Robin Murray, Frank Mort, Geoff Mulgan, Goran Therborn, John Urry

**Martin Jacques** is editor of *Marxism Today* and a columnist for the *Sunday Times*. **Stuart Hall** is Professor of Sociology at the Open University, his collected essays were published recently as *The Hard Road to Renewal* (1988)

Paperback £8.95 Publication October ISBN 0-85315-703-0

### The Soviet Revolution

#### Perestroika and the Remaking of Socialism

Jon Bloomfield (ed)  
(in association with *Marxism Today*)

This collection brings together an extraordinary line-up of expert commentators on the rapid and unstable transformation that is taking place in the Soviet Union, as the reform movement attempts to dismantle the repressive administrative system and to revive the stagnant economy inherited from Stalin via Brezhnev. The essays offer a panoramic view both of the background to perestroika, and the current difficulties and complex issues faced by Gorbachev and the reformers

**Contributors include:** Roy Medvedev, Julian Cooper, Monty Johnstone, Archie Brown, Martin Walker, Fedor Burlatsky, Stephen White, Mary Buckley, Dennis Ogden, Nick Lampert, Fred Halliday, Neal Ascherson, Jon Bloomfield

Paperback £8.95 Publication July ISBN 0-85315-713-8

### The Social Economy and the Democratic State

Pete Alcock, Andrew Gamble, Ian Gough, Phil Lee & Alan Walker (eds) - The Sheffield Group

This wide-ranging collection, aimed to coincide with discussion about the Labour Party policy review, represents a serious attempt to rethink the relationship between economic and social policies on the Left - leading to a re-integration of economic strategy and social aims. The Sheffield Group formed after the Labour defeat at the last general election, and this collection is intended as a timely contribution to socialist renewal

**Contributors include:** the editors and Allan Cochrane, Len Doyal, John Gabriel, Ruth Lister, Charlie Leadbeater, Doreen Massey, Chris Pond, Dave Purdy, Mike Rustin, Jim Tomlinson

Paperback £8.95 Publication September ISBN 0-85315-718-9

For further information and catalogues please contact



Publicity Department  
LAWRENCE & WISHART LTD  
144a Old South Lambeth Road  
London SW8 1XX  
Tel 01-820 9281 Fax 01-587 0469

## Gramsci and Marxism in Britain

Outside Italy, nowhere more than in Britain have Gramsci's writings exercised so prolonged, deep or diversified an influence. Some of this has been channelled through the academic disciplines of history, political science and cultural studies, but much of it has worked directly upon the theory and practice of the Left. There has been widespread recognition of the importance of Gramscian concepts in freeing Marxism from 'economism' since the sixties, and in interpreting Thatcherism and the crisis of the Left since the mid-70s. What has been less remarked upon is that they have been central to the theoretical reconstruction of Marxism in Britain at all stages since the late 50s.<sup>1</sup> The uses of Gramsci in Britain have been regionally specific; they have involved the overdevelopment of one side of his work at the expense of others. This imbalance can be explained by the needs which his texts have served to meet, the gaps they have served to fill in the culture of the Left. The impact made by new ideas never depends simply on their intrinsic quality; it also has to do with the degree of receptivity or resistance

of the culture into which they enter. In the thirty-two years in which selections from Gramsci have been available in English, the culture of the Left in Britain and the political climate have both changed considerably. Gramsci has become more readable. But he has also become readable in different ways, as the meanings which have attached to his texts, the uses to which they have been put, have altered.

As a baseline for any discussion of Gramsci's influence, two points need to be remembered about the peculiar nature of his legacy. The first is its fragmentary and posthumous character. His writings consist of letters, journalistic articles, internal party documents and a large body of manuscript notes only partially revised and systematized during his lifetime. This meant that his legacy was not passively 'handed down' but had to be actively constructed by his successors through a labour of assembly, rearrangement, annotation and (outside Italy) translation: processes which all involve interpretation and judgement. The first edition of the prison notebooks in Italy (1948-51) and the English editions published so far (1957, 1971, 1988) have been selections involving thematic reorderings of the original material. Only in 1975 did a critical edition appear in Italy, based on a chronological reconstruction of the manuscripts and including rejected drafts as well as revised versions. In English such an edition still has to see the light of day.<sup>2</sup>

The second point is the lag between the time in which the prison notebooks were written (1929-35) and the time in which they were

---

<sup>1</sup> This article developed out of a short paper on 'Gramsci and the British Marxist Tradition' given at *Marxism Today's* 'Gramsci '87' (London, 11 April 1987), and out of two other papers read at the half-centenary Gramsci conferences in Rome (24-26 June) and Tokyo (28-29 November) and now published in the respective conference proceedings. I am grateful to Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn for their comments on an earlier draft. In my account of Gramsci's reception in Britain I have drawn on personal recollections or unpublished papers of a number of people whom I here thank: Perry Anderson, Gino Bedani, Derek Boothman, Rosalind Delmar, Stuart Hall, Quentin Hoare, Eric Hobsbawm, Judith Hunt, Martin Jacques, Bob Lumley, Betty Matthews, Tom Naurn, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Anne Showstack-Sassoon, Roger Simon and Jeff Skelley. None of these is responsible for any errors in my account, and some of them would certainly dissociate themselves from my judgements and arguments. My discussion deliberately limits itself to political uses and reworkings by British Marxists. For a broader account of Gramsci's reception in various fields, including non-British material, see Geoff Eley, 'Reading Gramsci in English: Observations on the Reception of Antonio Gramsci in the English-speaking World 1957-82', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (1984). A longer version of the same essay is published as a working paper by the Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan. See also Harvey J. Kaye, 'Antonio Gramsci: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies in English', *Politics and Society* X (1981), 3. For an interesting look at the use of the hegemony concept in American historiography, see T.J. Jackson Lears, 'The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, February-December 1985. An international Gramsci bibliography is currently being compiled by a group based in New York under the direction of John Cammett and Frank Rosengarten.

<sup>2</sup> A complete translation of the prison notebooks, made on the basis of Valentino Gerratana's 1975 edition, is being prepared by Joseph A. Buttigieg of Notre Dame University for publication by Columbia University Press

received in Britain. Gramsci came, so to speak, to Britain across a wide spatial, temporal and cultural gap: on the one side Italy between the wars, on the other post-war Britain; on the one side the Third International and the struggle against fascism, on the other the culture of Labourism and the post-1945 welfare state. In making the crossing some parts of his work fell away while others were creatively readapted. Several differences between Gramsci's Italy and Britain are particularly relevant in explaining why this has been so. First, Italy's history was one of early rise and decline of merchant capitalism, political partitioning, late unification and late industrialization; as a nation-state it had remained weakly integrated. Britain's history was virtually the opposite. Second, Gramsci's Italy had a mass of agricultural smallholders and proletarians, a relatively small industrial proletariat and an underdeveloped South; Britain had a large industrial working class and no peasantry. Third, Italy had young and weak parliamentary traditions which gave way to Mussolini's 'Caesarism'; Britain had old and resilient ones. Fourth, Italy had a culturally powerful Catholic Church; Britain had a strongly secularized culture. Fifth, in Italy the dominant labour movement traditions were Marxist and syndicalist; in Britain they were Labourist. Sixth, in Italy the dominant cultural traditions were idealist and historicist (Hegel, Croce); in Britain they were empiricist and anti-historicist.

Because of these differences, several parts of Gramsci's work remained either untranslated or effectively unreadable in Britain. The untranslated parts include not only the many polemical forays in the prison notebooks (against Achille Loria, second-rate Italian novelists and so forth) but also whole tracts of text dealing with Croce's philosophy, the Catholic movement, the culture of the subaltern classes, the history of intellectuals. The unreadable or less readable parts include those dealing with the problems of constructing a national worker-peasant bloc and with the 'peasant question' generally, as well as with the formation of a national-popular culture. One can hazard a guess that the welcome appearance of a complete text of the prison notebooks in English will not remove this unreadability. Conversely, the parts of the Gramscian corpus that have been most creatively drawn on have been those dealing with the mechanisms of political stabilization and regulation in advanced capitalist societies, their resources of cultural and ideological 'hegemony', the dynamic and flexible nature of political alliances, the recognition of civil society as a terrain of political organization and struggle, and the need for the Left to break out of an 'economic-corporate' outlook and construct a hegemonic politics of its own. In general the tendency has been to draw Gramsci forward in time, to put him into modern clothes.

### The Modern Prince

Although Gramsci's work did not go completely unnoticed in Britain in the two decades after his death, it made a negligible impact before it first appeared in book form in 1957, in Louis Marks's edition of *The*



*Modern Prince and Other Writings*.<sup>3</sup> Marks had submitted the typescript in early 1956 to the publishers Lawrence and Wishart, whose managerial board was at that time directly accountable to the higher committees of the Communist Party of Great Britain. It was passed to the Political Committee for vetting but blocked on the grounds of its heterodoxy by a number of members, including Emile Burns. However, the events of 1956—Khrushchev's secret speech, the Polish and Hungarian crises, the consequent resignations from the CPGB—supervened to produce by the end of the year a changed political and theoretical climate. Maurice Cornforth, then managing editor of Lawrence and Wishart, pressed again for publication and the edition finally appeared in 1957.

Gramsci was thus conveyed into the culture of the Left on the tide of the post-1956 thaw, destalinization and the formation of the first new Left. These circumstances were crucially to affect the way his work was read, the meanings it assumed, in a first phase which lasted till about the mid-60s. The edition emerged out of the anti-Stalinist current within the CPGB (Marks was, together with Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill and others, a member of the Party's History Group) and to some extent smacked of that particular ambience. The book did not sell well and had relatively little resonance at the time beyond a small circle of people actively interested in Marxist politics. This lack of immediate impact was probably attributable as much to the small scale and market of left publishing in the late 50s, and the resistances of an insular culture to foreign novelty, as to any intrinsic limitations of the edition itself. In fact *The Modern Prince* provided an intelligent and fairly political cross-section of Gramsci's writings, even though it was too small a sample to give an adequate

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, notably, had dedicated two anonymous full-page articles to Gramsci, one in 1948 shortly after the first volume of the original Italian edition of the prison notebooks appeared, the other in 1952 after the publication of the sixth and final volume. See 'Marxism and Culture in Italy', *TLS*, 28 August 1948, p. 492 and 'More about Gramsci', *TLS*, 5 December 1952, p. 796. Among those who did know and make use of Gramsci before the Marks translation were Hamish Henderson and Eric Hobsbawm. In 1948–50 Henderson made a translation of the 1947 edition of the prison letters which remained unpublished until 1974. It is now republished with the title *Gramsci's Prison Letters* by Zwan, London 1988. He also drew on Gramsci's writings on folklore and popular culture in his own research into Scottish folk music. Hobsbawm first read the Italian editions of the prison notebooks in the early 50s. It can be noted here that the penetration of Gramsci's work in the United States began at exactly the same time as in Britain. In 1957 a slim selection of the notes on philosophy, with editorial interpolations tailored for an American readership, was published by Cameron Associates in New York. The translator and editor was Carl Marzani, an American CP member who had worked during the war in the State Department's Intelligence Office before becoming a union organizer and then a co-editor of Liberty Book Club. The title of the selection, significantly, was *The Open Marxism of Antonio Gramsci*. 'To speak of Gramsci as a Marxist with an open mind,' Marzani wrote in the preface, 'may strike many people as a contradiction in terms, because the behaviour of a considerable number of Marxists has bolstered ruling class propaganda that Marxism is a dogma. Marxism is not a dogma though there are Marxists who are dogmatists' (p. 6). Marzani had intended to make a more substantial selection than the handful of texts the book actually contains, but he was overtaken by the announcement of the Louis Marks selection, published in America under the imprint of International Publishers.

representation of his range or to show the interconnections between different thematic strands and concepts in the prison notebooks. For Gramsci to be assimilated into the British cultural system, he needed first to be mediated to readers by a work of intellectual brokerage and he needed a wider reading public.

The brokerage came in the early 60s from two directions: from the work on culture and class produced by intellectuals such as Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson and from the theoretically innovative writings on the British state and the labour movement by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn which appeared in *New Left Review* in 1963–64.<sup>4</sup> The first kind of brokerage was indirect. It was not so much a question of Williams or Thompson having read and been influenced by Gramsci in their own work at this stage—though both of them clearly did have some familiarity with Gramsci from the early 60s. Rather, it was that their work on culture provided a framework, an intellectual space, within which Gramsci, or at least a certain side of Gramsci, could be made visible and readable, a space which his own work would, in turn, begin to illuminate and reconstruct from within. Gramsci, or a certain way of looking at Gramsci, fitted in very well with the Marxist humanism and the 'culture and community' outlook which began gaining ground around 1956. Gwyn A. Williams saw Gramsci in this light in an article of 1960 which, although he would subsequently repudiate it,<sup>5</sup> remains highly significant as a snapshot of this moment:

His [Gramsci's] preoccupation with the 'moral' function of culture, his feeling for the quality of working-class life, his sense of the interplay among traditions, and his overriding concern with alienation and reintegration give his writing a peculiarly contemporary tone. The mind is the mind of a Marxist, but the emotions and the sensitivity which informed it were surely of the same qualitative order as those which impelled Sorel, even in his Syndicalist phase, to denounce sabotage as morally injurious to the proletarian ethos, and which drove the artist William Morris into the uncongenial Marxist British Social Democratic Federation.

It is this quality which makes Gramsci such an unexpectedly congenial writer to readers familiar with the current British literature on social and cultural relationships, which owes not a little to Morris. For much of this literature is being produced by Socialist thinkers who, for a variety of reasons, are becoming increasingly preoccupied with problems of a similar character. Indeed to come from Gramsci to, say, Raymond Williams's

---

<sup>4</sup> Tom Nairn, 'The British Political Elite', *NLR* 23, January–February 1964; 'The English Working Class', *NLR* 24, March–April 1964; 'The Anatomy of the Labour Party', *NLR* 27 and 28, September–October and November–December 1964; Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *NLR* 23, January–February 1964. See also the subsequent articles by Perry Anderson: 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism', *NLR* 35, January–February 1966 and 'Components of the National Culture', *NLR* 50, July–August 1968; by Tom Nairn see: 'The British Meridian', *NLR* 60, March–April 1970 and 'The Twilight of the British State', *NLR* 101, February–April 1976. The latter is republished as chapter 1 of *The Break-up of Britain*, London 1977.

<sup>5</sup> 'I now regard this article as itself a *symptom* of the kind of impact Gramsci made on some English-speaking readers in the late fifties and sixties... I now find [it] wrong-headed in perspective and in a sense irrelevant; it should be consigned to the memory-hole *Mae culpa*.' Gwyn Williams, 'The Making and Unmaking of Antonio Gramsci', *New Edinburgh Review*, Special Gramsci Issue III, number 27, 1975, p. 12.

classic study of the interplay of social and cultural values in modern British history, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, is to experience a peculiar sense of contact and continuity.<sup>6</sup>

The second kind of brokerage, that of Nairn and Anderson, was more direct. Tom Nairn, whose background in philosophy at a Scottish university had familiarized him with the Hegelian tradition, had read Gramsci in the Italian texts in 1957-58 when he was studying at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa. Gramsci's deflation of Croce, as well as his class analysis of Italian national history and culture, found strong echoes in Nairn, who in 1963 published in the PCI's cultural supplement *Il Contemporaneo* a highly original Gramscian analysis of English class history entitled 'La nemesi borghese'. This analysis was to underlie the Nairn-Anderson articles in *New Left Review*.<sup>7</sup>

### The Nairn-Anderson Theses

The content of these articles is well known and does not need to be repeated in any detail here. It should be pointed out, however, that they had a source in the long note on the Risorgimento (Notebook 19 Paragraph 24) where Gramsci discusses the different routes by which the bourgeoisie came to power in France, Germany, Italy and Britain. In Britain, Gramsci wrote, 'the old aristocracy remained as a governing stratum, with certain privileges, and it too became the intellectual stratum of the English bourgeoisie (it should be added that the English aristocracy has an open structure, and continually renews itself with elements coming from the intellectuals and the bourgeoisie)'.<sup>8</sup>

The Gramscian character of the Nairn-Anderson articles consists in five features. First, there is their attentiveness to the peculiarities of national history. Second, they take the form of an interweaving of long-period historical analysis, diagnosis of the contemporary situation and an attempt to work out a strategic perspective for the Left. Third, they make a distinct break with economism, manifested at two levels: in their severing of a direct and instrumental connection

---

<sup>6</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, 'The Concept of "Egemonia" in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci: Some Notes on Interpretation', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xxi, 4, October-December 1960. For the subsequent fortunes of this article in the culturalist current in English Marxism, it is significant that Edward Thompson was to quote its definition of hegemony rather than Gramsci's original text in his attempt to rebut Perry Anderson's alleged misreading of the concept of hegemony: see 'The Peculiarities of the English' (1965), reproduced in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London 1978, p. 283. A similar equation between Gramsci and humanism was made on the French Left in the wake of 1956. Simone de Beauvoir wrote: 'In a startling synthesis Gramsci, a Marxist, takes up bourgeois humanism' (*La Force des choses*, Paris 1963, p. 117). It was this dominant humanist Gramsci in French Marxism whom Althusser and Poulantzas (who both drew significantly on Gramsci: he was the subject of Poulantzas's doctoral thesis, and he underlies Althusser's 1962 essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in *For Marx*) were to attack in the mid-60s. See in particular Althusser's chapter 'Marxism Is Not a Historicism' in *Reading Capital*, London 1970.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Nairn, 'La nemesi borghese', *Il Contemporaneo* vi (1963), nn. 63-64.

<sup>8</sup> *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, London 1971 (hereafter *SPN*), p. 83; the corresponding passage in Italian is in *Quaderni del carcere*, edited by Valentino Gerratana, Turin 1975 (hereafter *Q*), p. 2033.

between the economic base and the political superstructure (the British state did not represent the economically dominant class directly but, as Tom Nairn put it in 1963, by 'a system of delegated hegemony')<sup>9</sup> and in their emphasis on the cultural and ideological aspects of political domination. Fourth, they display a peculiar awareness of the process by which historically contingent relations of social domination are eternalized and naturalized as 'common sense'. Fifth, they launch a critique of the labour movement for its failure to effect a passage from an economic-corporatist to a hegemonic culture, in other words to put itself at the head of a bloc of social forces.

Gramsci was thus assimilated deeply by Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson in a way that enabled them to pose in their turn a powerful alternative to two other forms of Marxism then operative in Britain: the economistic Marxist-Leninist science dominant in the Communist Party and the culturalist humanism then starting to be developed by Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson. Nevertheless, theirs was a relatively isolated assimilation, destined to be circumscribed within an audience mainly of 'professional' intellectuals: historians, political scientists. It was a relatively disembodied Gramscism in terms of a concrete political project. As a theoretical criticism of the corporatist failures of Labourism it was trenchant enough, but it had no corresponding practical vehicle within or around the labour movement able to translate this criticism into a programme of action.

In this respect, the contrast with the early reception of Gramsci in Italy could hardly have been sharper. There, right from the immediate post-war years, Gramsci was harnessed by the PCI to its own political project and it became almost impossible, given the way the party constructed its own intellectual descent from Gramsci, to think of concepts such as hegemony or the national-popular apart from their embodiments in its strategy of inter-class alliances and 'progressive democratization'.<sup>10</sup> From one point of view the non-party-political

<sup>9</sup> 'La nemesi borghese', p. 139. This conception of a delegation of power from bourgeoisie to aristocracy corresponds to one of the ways in which Marx and Engels had represented the relationship between the two classes in Britain (see for instance 'The British Constitution', *Collected Works*, Volume 14, London 1980, pp. 33-34). However, Perry Anderson, revisiting the theses more than twenty years later, argues that this description, which implies that the aristocracy had no real autonomy as a ruling class, should not be taken as canonical and points to other representations in Marx and Engels's writings. See 'The Figures of Descent', *NLR* 161, January-February 1987, pp. 22-23.

<sup>10</sup> The thesis of a strict line of continuity between Gramsci and the post-war PCI can be traced through a number of key documents, among the most significant of which are Togliatti's speech to the Central Committee of the PCI on 17 April 1957, 'Attualità del pensiero e dell'azione di Gramsci', now in P. Togliatti, *Gramsci*, Rome 1967, in particular pp. 130-33, and his introduction to *La formazione del gruppo dirigente del Partito comunista italiano nel 1923-1924*, Rome 1962, in particular p. 12. See also Giorgio Amendola, 'Gramsci e Togliatti', in *Comunismo antifascismo Resistenza*, Rome 1967, pp. 133-85. For a criticism of this thesis, see Mario Telò, 'L'interpretazione togliattiana di Gramsci e il problema della continuità della tradizione comunista italiana', in *Da Togliatti alla nuova sinistra*, Il Manifesto, Quaderno 5, Rome 1975. The continuity thesis was argued in the 50s and 60s, not just appropriatively by Communists but also by a number of left socialists and 'Bordighists' critical of the PCI, who traced the origins of the party's post-war reformism to the period of Gramsci's leadership in 1924-26. See, for instance, three studies which appeared in *Rivista Storica del Socialismo*: Stefano Merli, 'Le origini della direzione centrista nel Partito comunista d'Italia' (1964, no. 23), Luigi

assimilation of Gramsci in Britain at this time can be considered an advantage, because it meant that his work was not distorted in the same way to serve the 'battle of ideas' or instrumentalized within a party programme. From another point of view, however, it was probably just as distorting a limitation, for it led to a situation in which Gramsci was read highly selectively and, in political terms, rather abstractly. Gramsci was used to *fill the gaps* created by the theoretical and political crisis of Marxism-Leninism around 1956, to correct its economistic and mechanistic simplifications. He was interpreted mainly in a culturalist way, as the theorist of hegemony, the intellectuals, 'common sense', or as the 'theoretician of the superstructures'.<sup>12</sup>

### Gramsci after 1968

From the end of the 60s and through the 70s some previously neglected dimensions of Gramsci's work started to come to the fore. One reason for this was the student radicalization and the wave of rank-and-file industrial actions which lasted up to the mid-70s. Another was the availability for the first time of a wider selection of the early texts than had appeared in *The Modern Prince*, together with the publication of John Cammett's fine book on Gramsci, which included a detailed account of the pre-1926 years, and Gwyn Williams's and Martin Clark's well-documented studies of the factory councils movement of 1919-20.<sup>13</sup> A third was the appearance of a number of accessible and informative works about Gramsci as a whole, from John Merrington's essay in the *Socialist Register* in 1968 to Giuseppe Fiori's biography, which appeared in 1970 in Tom Nairn's translation. Above all, the appearance in 1971 of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, brilliantly edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, gave a more comprehensive picture of Gramsci's

<sup>12</sup> (cont.)

Cortesi, 'Alcuni problemi della storia del PCI (Per una discussione)' (1965, no. 24) and Andreina De Clementi, 'La politica del Partito comunista d'Italia nel 1921-1922 e il rapporto Bordigha-Gramsci' (1966, nos. 28 and 29). In the same period the thesis was called into question from the Communist side by Paolo Spriano's party history (*Storia del partito comunista italiano*, 5 volumes, Turin 1967-75) and from the magazine *La Sinistra* by those who sought to disentangle Gramsci's revolutionary and anti-Stalinist legacy from the subsequent positions of his party: see Lucio Colletti, 'Antonio Gramsci e la rivoluzione in Italia', *La Sinistra*, 1 (1966), no. 1 (translated as 'Antonio Gramsci and the Italian Revolution', *New Left Review* 65, January-February 1971) and Silverio Corvisieri, 'Gramsci contro Stalin', *La Sinistra*, 11 (1967), no. 6. On the historiographical debate over the 1924-26 period an article written by Massimo Salvadori in 1968 is still fundamental: 'Orientamenti della attuale storiografia del Partito comunista d'Italia (1921-1926)', in *Gramsci e il problema storico della democrazia*, Turin 1970.

<sup>13</sup> The phrase is that of Jacques Texier: see 'Gramsci, Theoretician of the Superstructures', in Chantal Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, London 1979. This article, originally published in *La Pensée* in June 1968, develops out of Texier's critical response to Norberto Bobbio's paper at the 1967 Gramsci conference in Cagliari, also translated in the Mouffe collection.

<sup>14</sup> See 'Soviets in Italy' (ten articles from the *Ordine Nuovo* of 1919-20 translated by Quintin Hoare and introduced by Perry Anderson), *New Left Review* 51, September-October 1968; John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, Stanford 1967; Gwyn Williams, *Proletarian Order*, London 1975; Martin Clark, *Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that Failed*, New Haven and London 1977.

political ideas and brought him to the attention of a wider readership.<sup>13</sup> There was now a growing market for the important studies of the late 70s and early 80s: those of Anne Showstack Sassoon and Joseph Femia, and translations of works such as Christine Buci-Glucksmann's *Gramsci and the State*.<sup>14</sup>

One effect of the introduction of the younger Gramsci was that a visible bifurcation opened up in the 70s between the early leftist of the factory councils and the later author of the prison notebooks. Very few studies in English during this period managed to connect these two figures in a convincing or coherent way; most tended to appropriate or at least implicitly prefer one or the other.<sup>15</sup> The Gramsci of the factory councils circulated particularly among Trotskyist groups, parts of the Labour left and labour movement.<sup>16</sup> The Gramsci of the prison notebooks made most impact on the Communist Party and on other political and academic circles increasingly intrigued by the PCI, Eurocommunism and the 'third way'. Significantly it was in the same period that *New Left Review*, which had made in the 1960s one of the earliest and deepest assimilations of Gramsci outside Italy, now staked its distance unequivocally from the PCI's Italian road, emphasizing the bankruptcy of the politics it sought in part to legitimate with a 'Eurocommunist' reading of Gramsci. Perry Anderson, in

---

<sup>13</sup> This edition reflects the more leftist reading of Gramsci which emerged in the later 60s in two respects, first in the selection, where the more political writings (party, relations of force, state and civil society, Americanism and Fordism) constitute the single biggest section of the book; secondly in the introduction and the presentations to single sections, where the continuity between Gramsci and the revolutionary Leninist and conciliar traditions is consistently argued. It is significant and creditworthy that, by contrast with the Louis Marks edition of 1957, Lawrence and Wishart should have entrusted the editorship to two people with a specialist knowledge of Italy neither of whom was a CP member and one of whom, Quentin Hoare, was explicitly critical of the official Communist version of the thesis of a continuity between Gramsci and the post-1945 PCI. The American publishers of the edition, the CP's International Publishers, were less happy with this policy. They disliked the long historical introduction to *SPN*, largely written by Hoare, which was clearly opposed to the PCI's version of Gramsci's political development and legacy, but they nevertheless included it. In the case of *Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926* (London 1978) they suppressed Hoare's introduction altogether.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, London 1980 (published by Croom Helm, a second edition with a new introduction and lengthy postscript was published by Hutchinson in 1987); Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process*, Oxford 1981—one of the best books on Gramsci in English; Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, London 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Two important exceptions were Judith Hunt's paper 'The Politics of the Economic Struggle' (unpublished) given at the Gramsci conference, Polytechnic of Central London, 1977, and Bob Lumley, 'Gramsci's Writings on the State and Hegemony, 1916-35—A Critical Analysis', University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, stencilled occasional paper No. 51, undated (but 1978). More recently, the Scottish film 'Gramsci: Everything that Concerns People' (1987), made for Channel Four by Mike Alexander and Douglas Eadie, with Tom Nairn as script consultant, managed very successfully (and unusually) to reconstruct the 'other' Gramsci of Sardinia and the Turin factory councils movement, although it dealt more marginally with Gramsci's role as party leader, his relations with the Comintern and his theoretical innovations in the notebooks.

<sup>16</sup> For example, 'Soviets in Italy' was reprinted as a pamphlet by the Institute for Workers' Control in 1968 (Pamphlet Series No. 11).

a long and textually stringent essay on Gramsci, drew attention to the contradictions in the prison notebooks, suggesting that in the end, with the concept of the war of position, Gramsci became deflected from the key problem of winning state power towards a form of social-democratic gradualism.<sup>17</sup>

Although Anderson's 1976 essay remains both historiographically important and politically incisive, neither it nor any of the other writings on Gramsci from critical left positions founded or wanted to found a Gramscian current in British Marxism. Their intention was otherwise: it was, in a double gesture, at once to reinsert Gramsci into the tradition of Leninist and early Third Internationalist Marxism and at the same time to expose and reject as a deformation the upproblematic assimilation of his work to post-Popular Front Communism and left social-democracy. If we want to find a positive political and theoretical development of Gramsci's work in this period we need to look elsewhere. Two currents seem particularly worth attending to. One was that in and around the Communist Party, where the Gramscian moment culminated in the Communist University of London (CUL) events in 1975 and 1976, the redrafting in 1976–77 of *The British Road to Socialism*, the emergence of a Eurocommunist majority at the party's 35th Congress in November 1977 and the formation of a new editorial board of *Marxism Today*. The other was in cultural and media studies, where the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University and the Popular Culture group at the Open University (Colin Mercer, Tony Bennett and others) were the central influences. In part these trajectories overlapped and became intertwined, notably in the person of Stuart Hall with his work (individually or in collaboration) on ideology, moral panics, the British state, 'authoritarian

---

<sup>17</sup> 'The Autonomies of Antonio Gramsci', *NLR* 100, November 1976–January 1977. Gramsci, according to Anderson, reproduced the error of left social-democracy in overplaying the centrality of hegemony and civil society and underplaying the coercive role of the state, with detrimental consequences for socialist strategy. This argument, however, seems to me wrong on two counts. First, it assimilates social-democratic strategy, and in particular Kautsky's pre-1914 strategy of attrition (*Ermattungsstrategie*), to Gramsci's war of position. The latter was not conceived as a 'parliamentary road' and was developed in quite different conditions from those of the Second International: these conditions included a defeated and divided left, inter-war capitalist regulation and fascism. Second, in its reconstruction of the concepts of state and civil society, the article ascribes both a conceptual (rather than merely terminological) slippage and an essential dualism and hierarchy to Gramsci's use of the terms (where civil society as hegemony/consent preponderates in normal conditions over state as domination/coercion). I find Gramsci both more consistent in his concepts and closer to Anderson's own positions than he recognizes, both on the state and on hegemony. Did not Gramsci write that 'the "normal" exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent?' (*SEN*, p. 80, footnote 49, Q, p. 1638) See on these points Anne Showstack Sassoon, 'Hegemony and Political Intervention', in Sally Hibbin, ed., *Politics, Ideology and the State*, London 1978, p. 17; Giuseppe Vacca, 'I vecchi argomenti dei critici di Gramsci', *L'Unità*, 26 July 1978; and Gianni Francioni, 'Egemonia, società civile, Stato. Note per una lettura della teoria politica di Gramsci', in *L'effettiva gramsciana. Ipotesi sulla struttura dei 'Quaderni dal carcere'*, Naples 1984.

populism' and the inadequacies of the traditional Left in the cultural field.<sup>18</sup>

### The New Gramscism

Let us examine these developments in turn. A Gramscian input into the theoretical work of the CP first became visible in the late 60s among the student cadres in discussions on the role of intellectuals,<sup>19</sup> but the most important uses were to be in the theory of the state, the revaluation of culture and ideology and the politics of alliances. Before the 70s the only influential theoretical account of the state in the political culture of the CP was Lenin's definition of it as an instrument for the domination of one class by another. In the 70s this account, which corresponded to one of Marx's conceptualizations of the state, began to be challenged through recourse to Gramsci's distinctions between 'East' and 'West' in terms of a different balance of state and civil society, coercion and consent, domination and hegemony, war of movement and war of position. For example, replying in 1975 to a debate on youth culture in *Marxism Today*, Martin Jacques criticized as economistic the position which treated culture and ideology as derivative spheres lacking any effectivity of their own. He argued that capitalist rule in the West was secured mainly through the hegemony of the bourgeoisie 'in the ideological and cultural spheres' rather than through coercion.<sup>20</sup> These arguments would reemerge in his draft for the revised *British Road*. In the section on how capitalist rule is maintained in bourgeois democracies, he wrote:

---

<sup>18</sup> See, among the numerous texts, Stuart Hall, Bob Lumley, Gregor McLennan, 'Politics and Ideology: Gramsci' in University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *On Ideology*, London 1978; Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London 1978, in particular the latter part of chapter 7 and the whole of chapter 8, Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, 'State and Society, 1880-1930', in Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz, eds., *Crisis in the British State 1880-1930*, London 1986; Stuart Hall, 'Popular Democratic versus Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of Taking Democracy Seriously', in Alan Hunt, ed., *Marxism and Democracy*, London 1980; 'The Great Moving Right Show', in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *The Politics of Thatcherism*, London 1983, 'The Culture Gap', *Marxism Today*, January 1984; 'Blue Election Election Blues', *Marxism Today*, July 1987. The last five of these are now collected in Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, London 1988. Relevant to this topic is also Hall's powerful lecture 'Gramsci and Us' in the same volume.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Derek Boothman's submission to the first national congress of the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation (Roundhouse, 1968) argued that students should 'fuse with the organic intellectuals of the working class to form what Gramsci called "the collective intellectual", the revolutionary Party' ('Students and the Organized Working Class', typewritten document, November 1968). The following year Martin Jacques, who was elected to the NC of the party in 1967 while still a student at Manchester University (he graduated in mathematics in 1968 and went to Cambridge), wrote a paper for the Cultural Committee called 'Intellectuals and their Role Today'. This paper, the nucleus of an article which was to appear in *Marxism Today* in October 1971, looked at the role of organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie in the mechanisms of consent, as well as arguing the more conventional position that proletarianized intellectuals (middle strata) could be drawn into an anti-monopoly alliance.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Jacques, 'Trends in Youth Culture. Reply to the Discussion', *Marxism Today*, April 1975, p. 111. The article with which Jacques had opened the discussion was in the September 1973 issue.



In these societies, the ruling class maintains and reproduces its position primarily through consent, by the voluntary acceptance of its positions by the mass of the people. This consent is supported and reinforced by force, by the use of the police, the armed forces, the law etc. Thus, where consent fails, then the state can and frequently does resort to force, if it is felt appropriate. . . .

The ruling class's position thus depends not only on its economic and political power but also on its cultural and ideological influence. From this follows an extremely important point. Class struggle is not simply economic or even economic and political. It is also ideological and cultural. It takes place in *all* areas of society. It concerns *every aspect* of people's lives.<sup>21</sup>

The use of Gramsci within the CP involved, as this suggests, an enlargement of the political sphere relative to the space it had occupied in classical Marxism, an enlargement which was effected at a number of levels. At the level of analysis, greater attention was paid to the mechanisms of consent, to the role of culture and popular ideology or common sense in reproducing the social order. There was also increasing criticism of the labour movement—no longer just for its reformism and electoralism but also for its 'economic-corporatism', its failure to act hegemonically 'as an all-round force and champion not only its own various economic interests but the political, ideological and cultural needs of its own various sections and progressive movements in general'.<sup>22</sup> At the level of strategy, some sections of the party developed an internal critique of a traditional kind of industrial work (winning key positions to influence union and congress policy but without a 'hegemonic' approach on questions such as the control and content of production, new technologies, union democracy or issues outside the immediate sphere of the union's work) and presented a qualitatively different conception of alliances as needing to be actively constructed and negotiated at the ideological and political level and not just as arising spontaneously out of a common anti-monopoly interest at the economic level. The second of these points was argued in a pamphlet written by Betty Matthews, then party Education Organizer, in 1977, which was clearly directed against economism, spontaneism and vanguardism. The policies and demands of the party must 'take into account the actual situation of different sections of the people, relate to the particular stage of the struggle and [be] aimed at achieving the greatest possible unity.' The

---

<sup>21</sup> Unpublished draft of chapter 1 of *The British Road to Socialism*, undated (but 1976), p. 3. The text of the final version was considerably changed, and the formulations that remain sit rather uneasily alongside a more instrumental-conspiratorial account of hegemony (e.g. 'The family and the school often perpetuate and reinforce capitalist ideas among children', *The British Road to Socialism*, 5th edition, Communist Party, 1978, p. 9). The rewriting of the *British Road* was carried out in the first instance by a commission which included John Gollan, George Matthews, Dave Priacott, Martin Jacques, Pete Carter and Judith Hunt. Their versions were submitted, revised and composited during 1976. The draft text was published in January 1977 after being discussed and adopted by the November 1976 WC, extensively debated in *Comments* and the *Morning Star* and then revised at Congress in November 1977 by the adoption of 780 out of the 2,600 amendments submitted by party branches, boroughs and districts.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

party 'learns from the people as well as influencing them. It makes mistakes when analysis is incorrect.'<sup>23</sup>

Very significant at this time also was Eric Hobsbawm's intervention at the March 1977 Gramsci conference (jointly organized by Lawrence and Wishart and the Polytechnic of Central London), which was reproduced in the July 1977 issue of *Marxism Today*. Among the points Hobsbawm drew out from Gramsci's political theory were two which would have deep resonances in the late 70s conjuncture. The first was the possibility that a 'passive revolution' within capitalism might reabsorb a failed revolutionary initiative from below. 'On the one hand the ruling class might grant certain demands to forestall and avoid revolution; on the other, the revolutionary movement might find itself in practice (though not necessarily in theory) accepting its impotence and might be eroded and politically integrated into the system.' The second was the Machiavellian point that the basic problem of hegemony is not how one comes to power but how one comes to be accepted in power.<sup>24</sup> These two points would be carried forward in Hobsbawm's subsequent arguments about the structural crisis of the British labour movement, the need for it to examine both the changes in capitalism and its own failures if it was to be able to reconstruct itself as a hegemonic force.<sup>25</sup>

### The Rise of Eurocommunism

The 'turn to Gramsci' within the CP in the second half of the 70s was not, as it has frequently been represented, simply a case of internal disputation between 'Stalinists' and 'Eurocommunists' but one aspect of a more widespread reappraisal of the stabilization of the British state after the industrial challenges of 1968-74, together with a consequent reassessment of left strategy. Nevertheless, one can say that it was Gramscian positions, together with a new interest in the contemporary PCI, the concept of revolution as a process and the critique of aspects of actually existing socialism, which constituted the main theoretical underpinning of 'Eurocommunism' in the British context and which were fought for and strongly resisted within the party, both around the 35th Congress and for a decade afterwards. Their value during the 70s and 80s lay essentially in the way they made available a theoretically sharper analysis of ruling-class hegemony and popular consent as well as a critique both of Labourist economic-corporatism and of blind-alley left sectarianism. To this one must add the impact in the wider Left of the analyses of the halting of Labour's forward march and of Thatcherism which began to emerge in *Marxism Today* from 1978. Roger Simon's lucid book on Gramsci, which appeared in 1982, can be seen as a kind of *summa* of these developments of

---

<sup>23</sup> *The Revolutionary Party*, Education Department of the Communist Party, 1977, pp. 4 and 5.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'Gramsci and Political Theory', *Marxism Today*, July 1977, pp. 210, 211. See also Hobsbawm's essay 'Gramsci and Marxist Political Theory' (originally a paper read at the Gramsci conference in Florence, 9-11 December 1977) in Anne Showstack Sassoon, ed., *Approaches to Gramsci*, Writers and Readers, London 1982.

<sup>25</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Forward March of Labour Halted', *Marxism Today*, September 1978.

Gramscism within and around the CP.<sup>26</sup> His Gramsci is squarely a post-Leninist, a theorist of broad alliances which are negotiated rather than pre-given, popular-democratic and not just class alliances. He is the theorist of war of position rather than frontal assault on the state, the figure who provides the conceptual keys (organic crisis, hegemony, national-popular) which enable one to unlock the mysteries of the Thatcherite solution to the crisis of British capitalism and simultaneously to expose the weaknesses of Labourism and ultraleftism in resisting and transcending it.

Roger Simon had already played a central role fifteen years earlier in the dissemination of Gramsci in Britain. Introduced to Gramsci's work by Steve Bodington, it was he and Bodington who proposed to Lawrence and Wishart in the mid-60s the project of a new and fuller translation of the prison notebooks, and who took responsibility for seeing that edition through. In the late 70s, Simon's own interpretation of Gramsci began to be influenced by the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, most notably the post-Leninist interpretation of the hegemony concept advanced by Mouffe and the concepts of 'articulation', 'popular-democratic' ideological interpellations and 'people'-power-bloc contradictions developed by Laclau.<sup>27</sup> For Simon, working-class hegemony is constructed at the political and ideological level precisely when the working-class movement transcends demands based purely on class and takes on board issues of a popular-democratic kind, such as peace, civil liberties or women's rights.

Laclau and Mouffe's formulations appear also to have contributed theoretically towards Stuart Hall's work on Thatcherism. Hall has never been a CP member, but he has operated since the mid-70s very much in the political orbit of the CULs and *Marxism Today* and he has been a powerful influence upon the Party and a wider spectrum of left opinion. Like Simon, he encountered Gramsci's work back in the early 60s in the Louis Marks translations and through Gwyn Williams's 1960 essay, but he did not really assimilate a Gramscian Marxism until the mid-70s when, at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, he re-read Gramsci afresh as an antidote to the elements of reductionism, abstract sociological categorization and anti-historicism in Althusserian and Poulantzian Marxism. Gramsci, in other words, was now reintroduced into British Marxism *after* its honeymoon with Althusserian structuralism; he emerged in a new guise as a 'post-Althusserian', someone who offered a theoretical perspective which, while still squarely rooted in historical materialism, gave an adequate account both of the complexities of modern political and cultural

<sup>26</sup> *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, London. For a fundamentalist critique from within the CP, see the pamphlet produced by Robert Griffiths for the Cardiff Marxist Forum, 'Was Gramsci a Eurocommunist? A Reply to Roger Simon' (undated, but 1984). A similar line of argument is to be found in Chris Harman's review of the book, 'What Gramsci Didn't Say', *Socialist Review*, March 1983.

<sup>27</sup> See Mouffe's essay 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci', in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, Laclau's chapters on 'Fascism and Ideology' and 'Towards a Theory of Populism', in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, London 1975, and Laclau and Mouffe, 'Socialist Strategy—Where Next?', *Marxism Today*, January 1981.

formations and of popular common sense, avoiding the functionalism of the Althusserian account of ideology. These aspects of Gramsci's writing were then theoretically enriched, in Hall's work, by Laclau and Mouffe's discussions of the discursive functioning of ideology, its construction of subjects through discourse (interpellation) and its linking of discursive themes (nation, self-help, etc.) to class subjectivities (articulation) so as to produce an apparently coherent and seamless 'common-sense' account of the world. This 'enriched' Gramscianism can be found in all of Hall's work on authoritarian populism, from his contributions to *Policing the Crisis* (1978) to his more recent arguments about the success of Thatcherism and the related weaknesses of the Left in terms of cultural styles and images.

### The Rejection of 'Essentialism'

Within all these theoretical developments of Gramsci there is a common core: a rejection of any form of 'class essentialism', in other words of any derivation of political interests and behaviours from an alleged underlying economic class interest. In Mouffe's characterization of Gramsci, the great innovation of the hegemony concept consists precisely in its breaking of a pre-given link between economic class and political behaviour. In Laclau's work of the 1970s, ideologies (such as nationalism) do not have a 'necessary class belonging' but can attach to different class discourses by different processes of articulation. In Hall's work, the power of Thatcherism consists largely in its skill in disconnecting a number of themes (self-help, anti-statism, public order, anti-unionism, nationalism, share ownership, etc.) from the bourgeois discourse in which they had previously lodged and rearticulating them within a discourse of popular common sense. The corresponding weakness of the Left consists not just in its failure to 'go and do likewise', to construct a popular discourse of socialism, but in its very inability to comprehend or its reluctance to recognize the extent of Thatcherism's popularity, its radical alteration of the rules of the discursive game. For Hall, then, but also for Simon and for Laclau and Mouffe, a reconstructed Left has to be a non-essentialist Left, one which no longer relies on an appeal to traditional class interest and class unity as a basis for a socialist politics. Not only (Hall's emphasis) has the class shifted in its forms of work, in its ethnic composition, in its culture and its subjective identifications. Also (Simon's emphasis, but also Laclau and Mouffe's in their more recent work) class itself is only one of the sites on which people's subjectivity is constructed. A popular-democratic politics must take account of a plurality of these sites and build them into a movement.<sup>28</sup>

The analysis in all these writings seems to me extremely powerful and in several respects unimpeachable. But they have two main weaknesses. First, and this is an effect of their strong development of the

<sup>28</sup> See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London 1985. See also the recent discussion of this work in *New Left Review*: Norman Geras, 'Post-Marxism?' NLR 167, November–December 1987; Nicos Mouzellis, 'Marxism or Post-Marxism?', NLR 167, January–February 1988; Norman Geras, 'Ex-Marxism without Substance', NLR 169, May–June 1988.

anti-economistic elements in Gramsci's work, they do not take a *whole view* of capitalist society and of the transition. They overdevelop the cultural and political level of analysis at the expense of the economic. They fail to complement the analysis of Thatcherism at a political and ideological level with an analysis of it as a mode of economic and social regulation, as *both* a more or less coherent strategy for the modernization of the UK economy *and* a conservative recomposition of social and moral life. Second, and stemming from this, they are weak when they move from the analytical and critical-descriptive level to the level of prescription and strategy. Indeed, in a *sense*, it is the very force and radicalism of their analysis that produces problems at the prescriptive and strategic level.

- o This has been particularly the case in the CPGB in the phase which opened with the 35th Congress in 1977, a phase which is starting now to be superseded theoretically with the publication in June 1989 of the party's new draft programme *Manifesto for New Times* for discussion before the 41st Congress in November. This phase, which has coincided more or less with the ascendancy of Thatcherism and the crisis of Labourism, has seen in the CP an 'advanced' neo-Gramscian analysis sitting uneasily side by side with forms of political organization and activity which have remained largely unreconstructed. Having displaced a series of orthodox positions on the state, economism, class, the party and alliances, the CP arrived at a radical programme for building progressive social alliances but without any equivalent renewal of the political forms and agencies necessary for carrying out such a programme and, moreover, without a coherent vision of how to transform the economy in accordance with this radical politics. How, for instance, could one reconcile in the political practice of the post-1977 CP an advocacy of a plurality of progressive movements, in which no one movement claimed supremacy or a monopoly of knowledge, with the Leninist form of the party governed by the principles of democratic centralism? Moreover, it was not always clear how this radical democratic strategy would become a strategy of *socialist* transformation. Rather there was a broad perspective—a 'war of position'—in which the main focus of attention was displaced from the long-term aim of winning state power and transforming the economy to the medium-term aim of transforming civil society and rebuilding the Labour left on progressive centrist positions.

In this perspective the construction of *alliances* came to constitute the central task. These alliances were no longer, as before, seen as being pre-given and cemented by the same objective class interest—this was the old economistic conception of the anti-monopoly alliance which dated from the Popular Front and underlay the first (1951) edition of the *British Road*. They were seen, rather, as arising out of the subjective consciousness and struggle of groups oppressed on *different* terrains—for example, women, gay men or black people—not all of which were directly related to class oppression. Moreover, although the post-1977 CP saw itself as playing a central role in the construction of these alliances, for instance within trade unions or in broad movements like CND, its limited size and influence effectively undermined the credibility of this notion. In reality it had to be the labour movement,

together with the ensemble of progressive movements, which would play the central role, with CP members as at most a radicalizing presence or with the party as a flanking force. However, this rendered the notion of a central role, or leading role, increasingly problematic. In other words the notion of a plurality of social forces and movements and a dispersal of the sites of political power was hard to square with the notion of hegemony in a Gramscian sense, which is highly directive, a notion of leadership.

### Modes of Elaboration

These developments out of Gramsci were without question elaborations, recastings of Gramscian concepts. It is important to be clear about this, since it has always been the principal terrain of contestation between those on the left who have sought to put Gramsci back within a more or less orthodox Leninism and those who have by contrast sought to draw out, to 'produce', the popular frontist elements of his work. First, Gramsci's own conception of proletarian hegemony involved the mobilization by the working class of other classes or class fractions, in the first instance on the grounds of these groups' immediate demands and grievances but ultimately on the grounds of their common interest as collective exploited or oppressed producers in overthrowing the capitalist order and installing socialism.<sup>29</sup> It is precisely this notion of an objective core of common interest that has been challenged recently by the view (which has sought legitimation from Gramsci) of a plurality of asymmetrically related oppressions and sites of resistance. Second, Gramsci's conception of the transition, although it certainly involved, in conditions of a strong civil society, a long war of position, also indicated the capture of state power as a precondition for the withering away of the state-as-coercion. Moreover, in Gramsci's conception of post-revolutionary development, a phase of coercive state control is necessary for the building of socialism, because it serves for the defence of socialist legality and the construction of a planned economy.<sup>30</sup> Third, Gramsci's conception of alliances was one in which the mass party itself was a central site and

<sup>29</sup> See for instance Q, p. 1053; SPN p. 263: 'The content of the political hegemony of the new social group which has founded the new type of State must be predominantly of an economic order: what is involved is the reorganization of the structure and the real relations between men on the one hand and the world of the economy or of production on the other.' See also Q, p. 1591; SPN p. 161: 'though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity.'

<sup>30</sup> See Q, p. 764; SPN, p. 263, where Gramsci envisages a 'phase of the State as night-watchman—i.e. of a coercive organization which will safeguard the development of the continually proliferating elements of regulated society, and which will therefore progressively reduce its own authoritarian interventions.' See also Q, pp. 1570-1, SPN, p. 247: 'Because one is acting essentially on economic forces, reorganizing and developing the apparatus of economic production, creating a new structure, the conclusion must not be drawn that superstructural factors should be left to themselves. The State, in this field too, is an instrument of "rationalization", of acceleration and of Taylorization. It operates according to a plan, urges, incites, solicits and "punishes"; . . . The Law is the repressive and negative aspect of the entire positive, civilizing activity undertaken by the State.' For a good discussion of these passages, see Buch-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, pp. 282-90.

vehicle of alliances. It rested to quite a large extent on a totalizing notion of the party and a totalizing conception of the 'intellectual and moral reformation' in which ways of thinking and acting compatible with the 'philosophy of praxis' would themselves become a foundation of a popular common sense, the theory of the contradictions in class society and the practice of their transcendence and elimination.

In all these respects, the gap between the political culture in which Gramsci's concepts were originally developed and that in which they have been reutilized is considerable. How should one deal with this gap? To respond to it in late 1980s Britain by calling for a 'return to Gramsci', in the sense of a literal recuperation of the political culture he exemplified—single mass party, class leadership of alliances, war of position leading to frontal attack on the state, development of a socialist command economy—is in my view a political non-starter. And yet to accept the reutilization as unproblematic, particularly in the version of Laclau and Mouffe, seems equally mistaken. This version has allowed the centrality of the socialist project and of the labour movement to disappear, without any convincing theorization of a politically efficacious alternative.

Gramsci, it must be reiterated, was a Communist of inter-war Europe. Whatever continuities some Marxists may have with that age in terms of collective memory, a yawning chasm now divides us from it in economic, political and cultural terms. The tendencies towards product standardization and mass production so acutely analysed by Gramsci have been overtaken by tendencies towards product innovation, market segmentation and diversification, towards flexibilization and a new spatial division of labour, both internationally and within single nation-states; the composition of the working class and the nature of work have changed; new core-periphery divisions have opened up; feminism (on which Gramsci, on even the most generous of readings, has an ambiguous record) has produced a major challenge to many of the traditional positions and styles of the left; the threats of global annihilation and of the destruction of nature have reshaped the political agenda of most socialists. In addition, the two historic parties of the European left—the social-democratic and the Communist—have in many countries become divided into traditionalist and reconstructed wings; their unity and coordination across national frontiers is limited to say the least, their membership is in decline. Many political initiatives, for example in the areas of feminism, gay and lesbian politics or in those of ecology and peace, have developed outside the party form and do not necessarily seek or find expression within it.

The point, I would argue, is to recognize this distance between political cultures but to respond to it as socialists. I shall end with two suggestions. First, we need to learn the lesson of Gramsci's consistent attention to the specificities and concrete modalities of historical and cultural situations. Like Lenin before him, Gramsci insisted on an 'exact reconnaissance' of historical situations in the development of a political strategy. If one wants to adapt Gramscian insights and concepts to new conditions, one has to carry out a work of historical and

theoretical 'translation'. But one must not lose in the process the socialist and revolutionary vision which lay at their centre.

Second, I would argue that the Left needs to be much more attentive than in the past to the *integral* nature of Gramsci's Marxism. This has tended to get lost, for reasons I have outlined, amidst the dominantly culturalist and 'superstructuralist' developments of his work in Britain and the partisan struggles over his concept of the transition. Gramsci has a 'whole system' view of the social formation. This view, which has been recently developed in particular by the French regulation school (Aglietta, Lipietz) and by Przeworski and Burawoy in the United States,<sup>31</sup> is articulated through a series of key concepts: historical bloc, hegemony, ethical state, organic/conjunctural. It is a different view, it seems to me, from other whole-system views in Marxism, which in one way or another end up trapped in a reductionist logic, whether it be the 'expressive totality' of Lukács and the Frankfurt School, the functionalism of Althusserian structuralism or the post-structuralist critique (itself a totalizing strategy) of all forms of totality as 'essentialist', culminating in Laclau and Mouffe's disintegration of the social into a structureless plurality of political subjectivities. Gramsci's whole-system view provides a way of conceptualizing the relations between economic conditions, state forms and political action which allows for specific descriptions of the formal constraints and determinations at work in the system but does not see the outcomes of particular political struggles as pre-given. If we want this sort of whole-view Marxism in Britain—and in the present disorientation of our socialist culture I would argue that we badly need it—then we still need Gramsci.

---

<sup>31</sup> See Adam Przeworski, 'Material Bases of Consent: Economics and Politics in a Hegemonic System', *Political Power and Social Theory*, No. 1 (1980); Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism*, Chicago 1979, and *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism*, London 1985.



# Cambridge

## **Alternatives to Capitalism**

Edited by **JON ELSTER** and **KARL O. MOENE**

This provocative new collection assesses alternative institutional arrangements to capitalism which avoid the problems of centralised socialist planning and includes contributions from the editors, Jerry Cohen, Alec Nove, John Roemer, Gyorgy Sziracki, Tamas Bauer, and Martin Weltzman.

£22.50 net Hc 0 521 37178 8 187 pp

£7.95 net Pb 0 521 37815 X

*Studies In Marxism and Social Theory*

*Now in paperback*

## **Analytical Foundation of Marxian Economic Theory**

**JOHN H. ROEMER**

'Readers who want to be brought up-to-date on Marxian economics should turn to the book under review, which supersedes all earlier expositions.'

Jon Elster, *The London Review of Books*

£8.95 net Pb 0 521 34775 0 231 pp

## **Gramsci and the History of Dialectical Thought**

**MAURICE FINOCCHIARO**

This interpretive and evaluative study of Antonio Gramsci's thought proceeds from a rigorous textual analysis of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and provides a critical reappraisal of both Gramsci and the dialectical approach as a mode of enquiry.

£30.00 net 0 521 36096 X 324 pp.

## **Orwell and the Politics of Despair**

A Critical Study of the Writings of George Orwell

**ALOK RAI**

This study considers Orwell as both a political writer and a literary artist. Dr Rai draws on a wide range of Orwell's writing and, making use of the insights of contemporary literary theory, he demystifies the idea of Orwell as a 'transparent' writer, simply concerned with basic human values. By means of close reading Rai relates the literary style to the political beliefs.

£25.00 net 0 521 34519 7 208 pp.



**Cambridge**  
University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU

# SAGE

## New Books

### FRAMEWORKS OF POWER

Stewart R Clegg

Jul 1989 • 272pp • Hbk £25.00 • Pbk £9.95

### THE CHANGING SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Chris Hamnett, Linda McDowell and  
Phillip Sarre *Editors*

Mar 1989 • 300pp • Hbk £25.00 • Pbk £8.95

### CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CULTURE

Politics in a Postmodern Age

John R Giddings *Editor*

May 1989 • 272pp • Hbk £27.50 • Pbk £10.95

### CORPORATISM IN PERSPECTIVE

An Introductory Guide to Corporatist Theory

Peter J Williamson

Apr 1989 • 272pp • Hbk £25.00 • Pbk £8.95

### POLICING 'DOMESTIC' VIOLENCE

Women, the Law and the State

Susan S M Edwards

Aug 1989 • 272pp • Hbk £25.00 • Pbk £9.95

### COLONIALISM, TRADITION AND REFORM

An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse

Bhikhu Parekh

Jul 1989 • 288pp • Hbk £19.75 • Pbk £10.95

 SAGE Publications Ltd, 28 Banner Street, London EC1Y 8QE

## Collets

### The Book People of the Left

#### COLLETS INTERNATIONAL SHOP

129-131 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0EQ

Telephone: [01] 734 0782/3

The very best of general books, especially British & foreign fiction. The broadest spectrum of books, journals & pamphlets on all aspects of politics, economics, social science, & the labour and trade union movement. Russian & Slavonic literature, teaching & learning aids. Travel & guide-books from & about the USSR & Eastern Europe. Art books from the USSR. EFL & Open University textbooks. Third world, gay & feminist politics, ecology & peace publications. Classical records & sheet music from the USSR. Folk music dept. & songbooks. Political posters & badges.

#### COLLETS PENGUIN BOOKSHOP

64-66 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0BD. Tel: [01] 836 6303  
Most Penguins, Pelicans & Puffins in print. Secondhand science section. Reference, travel, & cookery books. The best of modern fiction.

#### COLLETS CHINESE BOOKSHOP & GALLERY

40 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PJ  
Tel: [01] 580 7538

Books in Chinese & English from & about China. Chinese language aids & oriental art books. Traditional Chinese handicrafts & works of art; antiques, prints, jewellery, porcelain and embroideries. Chinese artists' materials.

MAIL ORDERS WELCOME

*review*

Kate Soper

## Feminism as Critique

The usual idea behind the collective anthology is that it should serve as a means for bringing together the thought of several different authors in debate upon a common theme. In practice, this rarely happens, and it is all too common for volumes of this kind to be no more than aggregations of quite disparate pieces of writing. *Feminism as Critique* is an improvement on many collections in this respect.<sup>1</sup> It is by no means an entirely integrated whole, and some of the claims to unity made in the introduction are rather forced and not borne out in the articles themselves. Nevertheless, there is a definite community of purpose here, which is manifest at the most general level in the concern of all the articles to move feminism beyond its initial phase of 'deconstructive' criticism towards a more positive work of theoretical 'reconstruction'. What is needed now, it is said, is not so much exposure of the gender bias or blindness of theory as a re-working of the theory itself in order to render it more adequate to female experience. This brings us to a second, somewhat more specific, unity claimed for this volume

—namely, that its various authors are all in their differing ways engaged with strands of twentieth-century Marxism. The reworking of Marxist theory, which is viewed as an essential feature of feminist 'reconstruction', is held to consist centrally in a 'displacement of the paradigm of production', with the main assistance sought in Habermas.

At the same time, there is a general agreement among all the authors—and here we have a third thematic unity—that liberal theory, so far from providing any kind of resource for renewal, is rooted in conceptions of the individual and approaches to the social which have very little to offer feminism: several of the pieces are concerned with the implicit masculinism of the 'sovereign' and 'disencumbered' self appealed to in liberal theory, and with the ways in which liberal conceptions of the 'public' and 'private' serve to reinforce an existing gender division of labour and its associated devaluation of traditional female roles.

Such a critique of liberalism is, of course, by no means novel, but as Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell suggest in their introduction, it is distinguished from a good deal of recent communitarian writing by its keenness to avoid any collapse of personal identity into social role. Though a feminist critique must recognize, against liberalism, the 'situated' nature of the subject, it must do it in a way which also challenges conventional social roles and avoids any confirmation of the gender identities and persona behind which the real subjectivity of women has so frequently disappeared. This poses a dilemma that is addressed in several of the later essays: how can feminist theory base itself on the uniqueness of feminine experience without reifying a particular definition of femaleness as paradigmatic, and thus succumbing to essentialist discourse?

It is an extended and convoluted theoretical journey, and by the time we have arrived at Josephine Butler's existentialistic defence of the notion of 'gender choice' or Isaac Balbus's staged clash between the Foucauldians and the object-relations theorists, we may well wonder how far we are still addressing anything that could be called Marxist or seen as plausibly contributing to its feminist reconstruction. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the most interesting and original feature of this collection lies in the engagement of so many of its pieces—albeit sometimes quite indirectly and often critically—with a central body of Marxist work previously almost unconsidered by feminist writers: the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and in particular of its sole surviving representative, Jürgen Habermas. This is in obvious contrast to the Lacanian and 'post-structuralist' preoccupations of a good deal of recent feminist theory, and allows one to mark out this volume as the site of a distinctive 'Habermasian' direction in feminist study.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, edited and introduced by Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, Polity Press, Oxford 1987.

## The Turn to Habermas

In noting this turn to Habermas as one of the main (though not the only) interests of this book, one is bound to ask why it has come so late. For there would seem to be quite a number of factors predisposing towards it. In the first place, there is the distinctly 'Marxian' character of feminist criticism. By this I do not mean to imply that all feminists are Marxist—which would be wholly absurd—but only that feminist argument conforms with the theoretical exercise conducted by Marx under the name of 'critique' in fusing critical and substantive elements. The Marxist critique, in explaining the source in reality of the cognitive shortcomings of the theory under attack, called for changes in the reality itself. And it was to signal their commitment to this combined analytic and transformative project that the early theorists of the Frankfurt School gave such prominence to the notion of 'critique' in defining their own programme: critique was to function not merely as negative contestation or as Kantian constraint on the flights of speculative reason, but as argued justification for concrete, emancipatory practice. It is with a similar programmatic aim in view that feminist argument seeks to transform, as it exposes, the social reality of the sex/gender system responsible for the sexism and general opacity to feminine concerns of dominant cultural discourse and practice.

It is true that in some of the later writing of the Critical theorists the negative criticism becomes so overshadowing that the emancipatory project dwindles to a flickering light against the general darkness of the historical nightmare. But it is never entirely extinguished; and in any case, as far as Habermas is concerned, his work has always been guided by an optimism which, he would insist, is not purely of the will but is grounded in the real possibilities of human communicative interaction. Contrasting his scientifically oriented critique with Adorno's more metaphysical leanings, Habermas has often stressed the aim of bringing social philosophy and the empirical social sciences into a mutually advantageous and corrective relationship, and suggested that it represents a return to the more collaborative and constructive spirit guiding the work of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, one might argue that it is the distinctive 'modernism' of its outlook that makes Habermasian theory more compatible with feminism. For both are opposed to 'post-modernist' subversion of the emancipatory project while resisting any 'anti-modernist' nostalgic formulations of it.<sup>3</sup> Just as contemporary feminism, despite many

---

<sup>2</sup> See Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity*, ed. Peter Dewa, Verso, London 1986, p. 108. Elsewhere, however, in the same collection of interviews, Habermas acknowledges that Adorno's critique of reason 'never darkens to a renunciation of . . . Enlightenment', and that in contrast to the 'post-structuralists' Adorno 'does not merely bale out of the *crisis* discourse which has inhabited modernity ever since the beginning' (see pp. 135–58).

<sup>3</sup> To describe contemporary feminism as 'anti-post-modernist' may seem a trifle bizarre given the extensive reliance of many of its leading exponents on post-structuralist argument. I have tried below to give some sense of the tensions this makes for between analytic and evaluative aspects of feminist theory. But to my knowledge, no one has yet produced a professedly feminist argument which explicitly shares in the post-modernist nihilism.

other disagreements, would seem united in seeking liberation but refusing to find it in any erstwhile condition of women, so Habermas has disallowed the idea that renewal can be sought in traditional forms, insisting that 'cultural modernism' is the only resource of any historically enlightened consciousness, while at the same time avoiding all post-structuralist conclusions about the inevitability of domination.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, the commitment to modernity and liberation has always gone together in his work with a 'Critical theory' distaste for instrumental rationality and its technocratic values which chimes with many of the themes of feminist critique of science. Similarly, the resistance to 'truth-splitting' (especially in the work of Adorno, though it is present in more qualified form in Habermas too), and the polemic against the distortions introduced in the severing of propositional from aesthetic or moral truth, have a distinct family resemblance with the forms of opposition voiced in *Feminism as Critique*, as in other recent works, to mainstream ethics and epistemology.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Habermas's championing of non-adversarial dialogue—of the liberating potential of forms of communication which have been freed from the distorting and blinkering effects of conventional norms and modes of authority—must recommend itself to a movement which has itself placed such weight on the 'non-violent' strategies of discussion and consciousness-raising.<sup>6</sup>

Granted, then, that there are all these affinities of approach, why has it been only so belatedly that feminists have turned to Critical Theory? In part, no doubt, because of the all-male, monastical atmospherics of the Frankfurt School; in part, perhaps, because even in the School's engagement with obviously relevant issues (the family, the 'authoritarian personality') and despite a general condemnation of the oppression of women in bourgeois society, it offers no detailed and sustained investigation of the patriarchal formation and its repercussions. This lends a slight note of pathos to those essays in *Feminism as Critique* which engage most closely with Habermas's argument (notably Nancy Fraser's excellent exposure of the gender-blindness which, she argues, vitiates his otherwise potentially pro-feminist rewriting of historical materialism). For there is more than a suggestion here that the male theorist is being shown what his theory would have had to say about

<sup>4</sup> See Dewa, ed., op. cit., pp. 106–7.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes 1986; Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women*, New York 1984; Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, Mass. 1982; Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science*, Dordrecht 1983; Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven, Conn. 1984; Janet Sayers, *Biological Politics: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Perspectives*, London 1982; Lorraine Code, Sheila Mullett, Christine Overall, eds., *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals*, London 1988; *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy*, ed. Morwenna Griffiths and Margaret Whitford, London 1988.

<sup>6</sup> The pluralism of Habermas's ideal of communication does, however, tend to conflict with the impulse of separatist feminisms.

the subordination of women were he to have devoted more serious attention to it—a patience of theoretical disposition which has its echo in the suggestion here and there in the book that this or that bit of Marx or Habermas is ‘not helpful’ to feminism. (To avoid misunderstanding: I thoroughly applaud this kind of constructive engagement with non-gender-sensitive theories. I just wonder whether the theoretical ghettoization of feminism is not protracted by the modesty which allows such theories to be ‘unhelpful’ as opposed to seriously flawed.)

### Economic Critique

Fraser’s article is cued by Linda Nicholson’s reproaches against the ‘economic essentialism’ of classical Marxism. Echoing much previous feminist criticism of Marx, Nicholson deplores the privileging of the labour of production (of food and objects) over that of ‘reproduction’ in which, from the standpoint of the philosophical anthropology of self-fulfilment through labour, she finds an abstraction from the whole issue of feminine self-realization. But she argues, in addition, that this implicit identification of economic activity with ‘male’ work is compounded by a projection onto Marx’s cross-cultural theory of the distinctively capitalist severance between productive and reproductive spheres of action. Marx is thus viewed as guilty of a ‘bourgeois’ eternization of the autonomy and ultimately determining nature of the economic—whose effect is to generalize the occlusion of child-rearing and domestic activity specific to market society. For it is only in this society, says Nicholson, that food and object production (the ‘economy’), which unlike reproductive activities lends itself to commodification, comes to structure other human practices.<sup>7</sup>

Against this background, both Nicholson and Fraser endorse Habermas’s down-playing of Marx’s cross-cultural claims, and credit him with recognizing much more clearly than Marx that the splitting off of food and object production and its allocation to the ‘official’ realm of the ‘economic’ is specific to modern society. Fraser in particular approves his four-term model of ‘private–public’ relations as far more adequate to the complexities of capitalist society. Thus, Habermas’s

---

<sup>7</sup> Nicholson further argues that this essentialism of the economic is embedded in Marx’s concept of class, which in giving priority to changes and conflicts in the sphere of commodity production, tends either to negate the role of biological reproduction, and to treat its activities as unchanging and a-social; or else to regard its changes as purely superstructural. Not only does this obscure the integration of ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ labour in pre-capitalist societies, it in effect preempts analysis of the distinctive character of the gender division of labour within relatively integrated kinship and feudal societies—thus leaving out of account the class-like features of gender division in the very different standing of the sexes in regard to the means and relations of social reproduction as a whole. Marxism, in short, despite its value in granting feminists insight into the historic character of the separation of family, state and economy, stands in the way of a proper history of the forms of integration and disintegration of ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ spheres, and thus in the way of any proper accommodation of gender relations (see *Feminism as Critique*, op. cit., pp. 23–7). One might note that a problem which receives no discussion by Nicholson is that of the occurrence in existing socialist societies of the divorce between ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ activity which she regards as specific to the market economy.

division between 'material' and 'symbolic' functions—between 'food and object production' and 'socialization of the young, group solidarity formation and cultural transmission'—theorizes a contrast between the 'public' work world and the 'private' domain of domestic reproduction. But at the same time, in the distinction between the 'systemic' integration accomplished by state and economy, and the 'social integration' characterizing the 'life-world', his theory incorporates a contrast *within* the 'life-world' itself between 'public' political participation and 'private' family concerns.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, it is argued that this categorial severance between 'material' and 'symbolic' and between 'systemic' and 'social' integration, reproduces the same abstraction from gender division of which classical Marxism is guilty in its tendency to accommodate traditional female roles within 'symbolic' reproduction, thus obscuring the very material character of much child-rearing practice. Conversely, by treating such practice and familial relations as paradigms of 'social' rather than 'systemically' integrated action, Habermas also obscures the systemic aspects of family life—which is, says Fraser, 'thoroughly permeated with power and money'.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Fraser claims that even as Habermas registers the ambivalence of welfare capitalism, and salutes the new social movements, including that of feminism, for contesting the 'erosion' of the 'lifeworld' by the systemic imperatives of power and money, he is deaf to the gender sub-text of its dynamics. Habermas rightly sees that even as it enforces social rights which constrain the power of capital in the (paid) work-place and of the paterfamilias within the bourgeois family, the means employed in defence of such rights have tended to be bureaucratic, turning individuals into clients of the state system and preempting their capacity to interpret their own needs, experiences and life-problems.<sup>10</sup> But, says Fraser, he fails to see that welfare systems are themselves dualized and gendered, reducing the woman's dependency on the individual male breadwinner but only at the cost of throwing her on the mercies of a patriarchal and androcentric state bureaucracy.

The problems, in short, of the encroachment of systemic-integration—which Habermas diagnoses and explores as typical of modern societies—are problems not only of overriding reification but also of 'rationalization' and 'modernization' of women's oppression. In his

---

<sup>8</sup> Fraser also welcomes Habermas's distinction between 'normatively secured' and 'communicatively achieved' contexts—that is, between contexts where relations are what they are in virtue of unquestioned conventions, hierarchies, norms of power and possession—the male-dominated family, for example—and contexts based on an explicit consensus achieved through uncoerced discussion—Habermas's 'ideal communication situation'. See *Feminism as Critique*, p. 38, and cf Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 85–6, 88–90, 101, 104–5.

<sup>9</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, p. 37. ('Systemic' integration is, according to Habermas, essentially steered by the media of power and money.) One might note that David Held has laid similar charges against the overly formal quality of Habermas's systemic/symbolic distinction, though not from a specifically feminist point of view. See his *Introduction to Critical Theory*, Berkeley 1980, pp. 390–92.

<sup>10</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, pp. 47f.



analysis of welfare capitalism, Habermas repeats the central error of his account of classical capitalism. By basing it on the same 'economy'/'lifeworld' and 'systemic'/'social' interaction divides, he allows the theoretic knife to 'cut for' patriarchal ordering rather than the overthrow of existing gender divisions of labour, social roles and values.<sup>12</sup> What is required instead, it is suggested, is a framework which does not put the male-headed nuclear family on the opposite side of the line from the state-regulated official economy, but is sensitive to the similarities between two institutions which, despite many other differences, conspire in enforcing women's subordination, 'appropriate our labour, short-circuit our participation in the interpretation of our needs and shield normatively secured need interpretations from political contestation'.<sup>13</sup>

### System and Lifeworld

One of the interesting features of this critique is that it highlights, without resolving, the tension between, on the one hand, the ('feminist?') values in the name of which one wants to resist the reification resulting from the advance of 'systemic' integration into the 'lifeworld'<sup>13</sup> and, on the other hand, the ('feminist?') values in the name of which the lifeworld/system distinction is itself being challenged. It is true that Habermas's framework tends to legitimize the institutional separation of family and 'official' economy. Yet, in contesting erosion of the 'symbolic' he is also defending that non-instrumental, socially interactive, affective modality of human relations which feminists themselves want to prioritize, and even claim as embodying a distinctively feminine ethic. Again, it is true that in deploring the encroachment of systemic imperatives, Habermas is relying on the idea that there are certain kinds of human activity (paradigmatically those of child-rearing and nursing) which *cannot* be commodified, because commodification proceeds only at the cost of their intrinsic qualities of personal and freely bestowed caring and loving. This might seem dangerously close to a rationalization of feminine domesticity, and such sentimentalism for the 'Symbolic' will not recommend itself to those women who have yearned for a bit more 'systemic' encroachment into their cherishing preserve in the form of proper public child care, not to mention wages for housework.<sup>14</sup> On the

---

<sup>12</sup>This mistake, says Fraser, is in turn based on and reproduces three errors: that of thinking there is a 'natural' division between symbolic and material reproduction with child-rearing falling to the former; that of thinking the domestic sphere has hitherto been virginally preserved from the penetration of power and money; and that of thinking that the basic vector of motion of late capitalist society is from state-regulated economy to lifeworld and not vice-versa (since in fact gender norms and meaning continue to channel the influence of the lifeworld into the 'systems' both of the economy—the continuation of the 'male' workplace, modes of division of labour, norms of pay, etc.—and of government administration—gender-divided welfare schemes, treatment of single-parent households as 'defective' families, etc.).

<sup>13</sup>*Feminism as Critique*, p. 36

<sup>14</sup>Whether it be that of the state or of money (as is increasingly the case with the ascendancy of the monetarist policy and the neo-conservative erosion of welfare provision)

<sup>15</sup>The more cynical may even detect a note of nostalgia for the loss of 'family values' despite Habermas's own emphasis on 'cultural modernism'. Why, it might be asked, has Habermas only begun to get really panicky about systemic invasion at the point where it threatens to come right into hearth and home?

other hand, however, we might note that Nicholson explicitly appeals to the non-commodification of 'reproductive' work in establishing her case against Marxism; and neither she nor Fraser seems of a mind to deny the worth of 'symbolic' values. Indeed, they and other writers in the book fear the loss of these feminine-associated values and forms of interaction even as they are critical of Habermas's failure to draw out the implications of his normative schema for feminist theory and practice. Much of the critique of the 'public'/'private' divide relies on a privileging of non-systemic activities which comes close at times to presenting these as essentially 'feminine'.

This means that any demand for a 'de-differentiation' of unpaid child-rearing and waged work, or for a closing of the public/private divide, will need to be clearly differentiated from any mere call for wages for housework or for a Soviet-style acclamation of the 'national service' of mothering—moves which would serve not only to advance the deplored systemic integration of modern society but also to perpetuate the existing division of gender roles. Paying for childcare would no more guarantee its removal from the realm of 'women's work' than would honouring housework as an act of citizenship on a par with soldiering necessarily ensure that men took a share in it. The real question here is what is wanted: that women should retain their traditional tasks but freed of their subordinated and devalued aura; or that the gender division of tasks should itself be eroded? Similarly, in regard to the division between public and private: are we wanting an upgrading of the derided 'private' aims, values and activities, or an obliteration of the distinction: a 'utopia' without a 'public' realm of emulation, competition, fame and recognition, or a 'utopia' which held traditional 'male' activities of little account but esteemed everything 'womanly'?

Or shall we say, rather, that we are looking not so much for erosions or inversions of the existing divisions, as for a more radical redefinition of these spheres and values themselves—such that, for example, the 'public' would no longer designate the domain of national chauvinism and individual careerism, but become associated with the extension of political space for the renegotiation of 'public' interests, standards of success and existing divisions of labour? Just as such a redefinition would begin to reveal the narrowness of a 'public' life that downplayed all other interests and attachments than those of work and career, so it would allow 'private' dimensions (one's existence as parent or spouse or domestic worker) to find some 'public' profile and political representation. It is this kind of extension of political space which I think Maria Markus has in mind in her interesting study of women's attitudes to success, when she draws attention to the importance of extending 'civil society' as a condition of the kind of institutional restructuring and revaluation of roles and relations that would take us beyond the existing conceptions of 'public' and 'private'.<sup>5</sup> Well aware that one is here talking as much about general human as about specifically feminist political concerns, she writes: "Though such a civil

---

<sup>5</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, p. 108

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

society is voluntary-associative and pluralistic, it—at the same time—can express and promote critical concerns over general issues kept off the agenda or treated in an unsatisfactory way. That is, it can promote what may be called “generalizable interests”, putting them on the agenda of public discourse, and stimulating the appropriate changes.”<sup>16</sup>

### Ethical Critique

The separation of public and private is associated by several of the essays in this book, particularly those addressed specifically to the issue of a ‘feminist ethic’, with the divorce between ‘reason’ and ‘desire’: a divorce deemed to be a bad thing and in turn associated with the limited ‘masculinism’ of traditional moral and political philosophy. Here, too, Habermas figures as a recalcitrant ally who, on the one hand, is credited with ‘developing a conception of normative reason that does not seek the unity of a transcendent impartiality and therefore does not oppose reason to desire’, but, on the other, is charged with being too attached to an impartiality based on an abstraction from affectivity.<sup>17</sup> Iris Young, defending what she calls a ‘dialogic’ conception of normative reason against the ‘monologism’ of deontological ethics, would even claim that the very idea of an objective understanding of an issue arrived at through discussion aimed at consensus is an illusion directed upon an unrealizable and unwanted goal. More fundamentally, she contests Habermas’s assumption that understanding rests on some common agreements about meanings—an assumption, she claims, which in invoking ‘identitary logic’ is guilty of the ‘metaphysics of presence’.<sup>18</sup> But taken to its ultimate conclusion, such an argument would make a nonsense of Young’s own request for our comprehension and agreement, and rests on the undefended premise that language is exhausted in the *relationality* of terms. As Castoriadis (who in fact is one of the keener critics of the limitations of ‘identitary logic’) has pointed out, ‘language is only able to function because, while on the one hand the significations which it conveys are nothing more than endless and indefinite referrals to *something other than* . . . (what appeared to have been said directly), yet *at the same time* these referrals can only be referrals because they refer *from* one term *to* another, and can only exist because they are relations between terms posited as fixed.’<sup>19</sup>

A more qualified, less Derridean, questioning of the value of impartiality is at work in Benhabib’s critique of the supposedly universally

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 68–9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *Crucial Moments in the Labyrinth*, Brighton 1978, p. 213. Young associates Habermas’s reliance on ‘identitary logic’ with his tendency to ignore non-verbal and non-literal aspects of communication—which, she suggests, reflects his failure to see that communication is moved not only by desire for agreement but by desire to love and be loved. This elision of charges, however, seems rather dubious. Habermas has himself suggested that he has abstracted from gesture and bodily communication in the interests of concentrating initially on speech but that their analysis remains part of his project (see Held, *op. cit.*, p. 332). More plausibly perhaps, it may be objected that he has mistakenly treated irony, metaphor, illusion and paradox as either derivative or deceptive versions of ‘genuine’ speech.

substitutable subject of standard political and moral reasoning. Rooted as it is in the privileging of the 'wholly autonomous, male, narcissistic ego', such theory has, in Benhabib's view, perennially reproduced a divorce between autonomy and dependency, and hence between an 'ethic of justice' and an 'ethic of caring'. That this divide, whose effect is to relegate women to a timeless 'natural' sphere of nurture and domesticity, is still infecting contemporary moral theory is plainly visible, she argues, in its pervasive reliance on a 'general other' conceived in abstraction from all the differences of outlook, feeling and situation of actual, concrete persons. Indeed, it reaches a kind of apotheosis in the Rawlsian assumption that behind the 'veil of ignorance' one can plausibly talk of persons coming 'without prior moral ties': a form of talk which strictly speaking would mean that the traditional ethical principles of reversibility and universalizability could not be realized, since where there is no real, but only a formal plurality of persons, there is no coherent sense of the difference between self and others upon which such a principle could turn.

These points against Rawls's 'Cartesianism' are well taken, but they should not be seen as supporting the extreme moral 'particularism' advocated by Young, or at least not if one thinks that respect for justice and equality is fundamental to our very conception of ethics. For if one does not abstract from ~~some~~ differences between persons, one removes the grounding for any moral demand that they be treated equally: why should they be, if they are not comparable in any respect at all? At the same time, one must surely resist the suggestion that in being 'impartial' one is abstracting from all differences of 'concrete' feeling and circumstance, since an ethics or legal system is only genuinely impartial precisely insofar as it takes account of certain differences and deems them relevant to decision and judgement. More sensitive than some to these problems, Benhabib herself advocates a 'communicative ethics of need' which combines recognition of the dignity of the 'generalized other' with acknowledgement of the moral identity of the 'concrete other'. This, she suggests, would allow all possible knowledge of the moral situation to come into play, including the affective constitution and specific history of the individual. The problem, however, with this attractive-sounding idea is that it would seem simply to shove the problem of moral agreement one step back. For how would the reconciliation of particular interests be practically achieved? One assumes through compromise and bargaining. But successful bargaining and compromise can only be conducted in the light of generally accepted moral principles.<sup>20</sup>

The issue of the compatibility of a 'feminist' ethics with respect for

---

<sup>20</sup> Habermas himself, of course, stresses the role of compromise and bargaining in reconciling particular interests. But given his commitment to a universal moral intuition as the ground for principles guiding decision-making, this would seem to present less of an obstacle to his theory, at least in principle. This is not to deny, however, that the theory may be open to other charges of circularity—for example, the definition of truth as the consensus reached in an ideal speech situation whose 'truth' itself, as such a situation, would seem to have no prior guarantee. See Dewa, ed., op. cit., pp. 163-4

principles of justice and equality has been raised in acute form by Carole Gilligan's challenge to Lawrence Kohlberg's 'justice and rights' measurement of moral maturity (a measurement by reference to which women in his experiments persistently recorded lower 'scores' than men).<sup>21</sup> Benhabib makes extended reference to the Gilligan-Kohlberg dispute, which is of special interest in this context given Kohlberg's influence on Habermas, but which is also commanding a more general attention from feminists at the present time.<sup>22</sup> The issues raised by this controversy are too complex to be adequately treated in the space of this review, and I shall add here no more than one or two very general points.

The first concerns the arguably over-rigid and simple oppositions—e.g., between reason and desire, cognition and feeling (the 'body'), justice/equality and caring/responsibility—around which the discussion revolves. In relying on these all too traditional philosophical polarities,<sup>23</sup> feminists reproduce the idea that 'male' reason and its 'public' forum and citizen modality do indeed represent a disembodied, affect-free zone, when nothing in fact could be further from the truth. Politics is all too much about conflicting desires, ambitions and dubious rationalizations of emotive forces; citizenship (from which Young claims the 'body' is excluded<sup>24</sup>) is all too obviously, in its central soldiering dimension, organized around the butchering of bodies and esteem for physical prowess. And how can we collude in the idea that 'impartiality' falls on the side of a 'masculine' ethics when we know how famously impartial judges have shown themselves to be in their assessment of rape cases, to name but one example? This brings us to a second point: which is that the goals of 'impartiality' or justice can only be challenged at the cost of undermining the criticism which feminism has so frequently (and surely justifiably?) levelled at the gender-biased nature of a great deal of supposedly neutral social practice (including that of social science itself). Indeed, if one takes the position that the quest for impartiality is itself mistaken and opposed to feminine values, then the whole point of complaining that 'masculine' universalist appeals or supposedly 'neutral' claims are not what they appear, would seem to be lost. Catherine MacKinnon, for instance, protests that when the state 'is most ruthlessly neutral, it will be most male; when it is most sex blind, it will be most blind to the sex of the standard being applied.'<sup>25</sup> But does not the whole

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Carol Gilligan, *op. cit.*, and 'Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A Critique and Reconstruction of Kohlberg's Theory', *Human Development* no. 23, 1980. Lawrence Kohlberg's most recent reply to Gilligan is in L. Kohlberg, C. Levine and A. Hewar, *Essays on Moral Development*, San Francisco 1984, Vol. II.

<sup>22</sup> See Sandra Harding, *op. cit.*; and discussions by Lorraine Code and Barbara Houston in *Feminist Perspectives*, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Polarities which, after all, are part of the baggage of the patriarchal conceptual schema—cf. the suggestion from both Rousseau and Hegel that women should be excluded from the public domain because they are the caretakers of affectivity, desire and the body—as if there were no bodies, desires or affects roaming loose in the public domain.

<sup>24</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine MacKinnon, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: an Agenda for Theory', *Signs* no. 7, 1982, p. 658. Cf. Marsha P. Hanen's discussion of legal theory and feminist critiques of scientific objectivity in *Feminist Perspectives*, pp. 29–45.

force of her argument rely on an implicit endorsement of the goal of objectivity and a demand that women should be treated to a genuinely 'sex-impartial' justice rather than placed at the mercy of a 'blind' subjectivity?<sup>26</sup>

### Essentialism and Existentialism

One of the paradoxes of the 'particularist' critique of ethical universalism is that it can only be consistently sustained within the perspective of a 'difference' feminism at odds with any Marxian-Habermasian commitment to parity and trans-gender agreement. Equally, however, it is very difficult to defend the 'difference' perspective without falling into an essentialism of the feminine which all the authors in *Feminism as Critique* professedly wish to avoid. This tension is dominant in the later essays—most of which are much less Habermasian in outlook—and particularly in relation to the 'mothering' psychoanalysis of Chodorow and Dinnerstein, which holds that 'mother-dominated' child-rearing lies at the source of patriarchy.<sup>27</sup> Carole Gilligan relies on their account of gender identity formation in her defence of a feminine 'ethics of caring'. Yet actually she is thereby led into a most undesirable essentialism. For if it is only in virtue of their nurturing experience that women acquire this ethical outlook, then there would be a moral duty to confine them to the mothering role as a way of guaranteeing the presence in society of these 'female' caring capacities.<sup>28</sup>

Gilligan has been defended against this charge on the ground that the Chodorow-Dinnerstein thesis only supposes these capacities to be 'female' in the sense that they are culturally devalued and hence not developed by men at the present time.<sup>29</sup> This rather misses the point, however, since the 'mothering' thesis, as Balbus makes clear in his eloquent defence of it against Foucault in *Feminism as Critique*, is

<sup>26</sup> Note that what is at issue here is not so much the feminist attack on the hypocrisies of the supposed neutrality of 'masculine' science but the feminist critique of the value of neutrality itself.

<sup>27</sup> See Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, New York 1976; Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley 1978; Jane Flax, 'Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics', in S. Harding and M. Hintikka, eds., op. cit.; Isaac Balbus, *Marxism and Domination*, Princeton 1982. Defending and expounding the 'mothering' or 'object relations' theory, Balbus writes: 'The heretofore culturally universal phenomenon of patriarchy is rooted in and reproduced by the equally universal fact of virtually exclusive female responsibility for early child-care. In all cultures it is a woman . . . who is both the source of satisfaction and the frustration of the imperious needs of the infant; she is at once the being with whom the child is initially indistinguishably identified and the one who enforces the (never more than partial) dissolution of this identification. Thus it is the mother who becomes the recipient of the unconscious hostility that accumulates in children of both sexes as the result of this inescapably painful separation. The mother who is loved is also the mother who is hated.' *Feminism as Critique*, p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> James Walker, 'In a Different Voice: Cryptoseparatist Analysis of Female Moral Development', *Social Research* 50, no. 3, October 1983.

precisely an attempt to *account for* this social devaluation of the feminine by rooting it in the male child's experience of the mother's separation. The resulting hatred of the mother is then transferred to 'all those who come to represent her, i.e. to women in general. And the exclusion of women from positions of authority outside the family reflects the terror of ever again experiencing the humiliating submission to the authority of the mother within it.'<sup>29</sup>

In fact there is no problem in defending the 'mothering' thesis against the charge of essentialism in any anatomical sense, since the repudiation of the feminine to which it appeals is not of the female *body* as such, but of the one who first satisfies, and then frustrates, the desire for identity—and though this has usually happened to be a female (the mother) there is no necessity for this. Indeed, the recommendation of the theory is precisely for co-parenting as an alternative to this secular but allegedly contingent state of affairs. It might be argued, however, that it is essentialist in another sense: that of supposing an inherent attitude of aggression to the (m)other's autonomy. It would seem, in short, to rely on an unresolved Master-Slave conflict of consciousnesses, on a supposedly primary resistance to the (m)other's subjectivity—resistance which arguably derives from that ideal of 'disembodied' autonomy which is the explicit target of so much feminist attack, including that of Balbus.<sup>31</sup>

The value and interest of Balbus's confrontation between Foucault and 'mothering' feminism do not, however, rely entirely on one's acceptance of that thesis, since his suggestion that a Foucauldian feminism is a contradiction in terms holds good for *any* feminist argument laying claim to truth and trans-historic generality.<sup>32</sup> Balbus's main formal objections to Foucault, in fact, are that in rejecting the idea of continuous history, together with the pretensions to establish 'True discourse' and uncover general historical meanings, Foucault has in effect ruled out any feminist claim to have discovered a 'truth' or 'meaning' in the massive continuity of male preeminence. A discourse on patriarchy as a trans-historic formation would itself, from a Foucauldian point of view, figure as a flight into humanistic mystification. What is more, any feminist project, such as that of Chodorow and Dinnerstein, which seeks to reveal the sources of gendered subjectivity must be seen from this same perspective as simply lending itself to the constitution—hence 'subjectification'—of

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Barbara Houston, *Feminist Perspectives*, pp. 178–9. Without this devaluation, claims Houston, 'we would have more boys identified with their mothers for longer periods in a non-traumatic fashion, who could then learn the relational capacities we think have a moral importance.'

<sup>30</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, p. 113.

<sup>31</sup> Why should the child react to the necessary separation from the mother figure with 'hatred' unless there is an underlying presupposition that the separation of the Other from the Self will be perceived as a threat to subjectivity?

<sup>32</sup> Balbus writes: 'From a Foucauldian perspective the discourse of the mother looks like a paradigm case of a "disciplinary" True Discourse, while from a feminist psychoanalytic standpoint the Foucauldian deconstruction of True Discourse betrays assumptions that can only be characterized as a classically male flight from maternal foundations. If feminism necessarily embraces these foundations, then a Foucauldian feminism is a contradiction in terms.' *Ibid.*, p. 110.

subjects. For Foucault, feminism's pretensions to reorganize the patriarchal 'totality' must present themselves as 'totalitarian'; for Balbus, this Foucauldian stance rules out as totalitarian the very awareness of domination.

Having argued Foucault into this theoretical corner, Balbus then obligingly offers him a way out by invoking a kind of Foucauldian epistemological 'better nature' which is always defying the ban on continuities, totalities and subjects. The logic of this rebellion, suggests Balbus, must in the end lead the Foucauldian to abandon the thesis of the authoritarian effects of *all* discourse in favour of a more discriminating position which would allow some true discourses to be libertarian in their effects. 'Mothering' psychoanalysis is, unsurprisingly, offered as the model of such a discourse, but again, in fact, Balbus's exposure of the inconsistencies of the Foucauldian argument and his detection of the possibilities of a more optimistic interpretation of its anti-totalitarian critique survive any scepticism about the truth of that particular exemplar.

### The Origins of Gender Difference

I have suggested that the 'mothering' discourse survives the charge of biological essentialism,<sup>33</sup> but it certainly locates the origin of gender difference in the biological distinction of the sexes, and is thus firmly rooted in the binary opposition of male and female. It is this opposition itself which is challenged in the pieces by Butler and Cornell and Thurschwell.

In a scintillating mix of de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig and (the *bon à toutes causes*) Foucault, Butler questions the whole necessity of gender distinction, putting in its place a modified existentialist thesis of 'gender invention'. She cheerfully admits that this may look fantastical from the point of view of any Marxian or Freudian 'Reality Principle', but then wonders whether the 'Reality' observed through the Marxian-Freudian principle is the only one we'll ever have. Butler argues that despite occasionally appearing to embrace a view of autonomy modelled on the disembodied transcendence of consciousness, de Beauvoir's suggestion that woman is not born but 'becomes' her gender rests on an implicit rejection of the polarity between (masculine) transcendence and (feminine) immanence in favour of a view of the body as 'situation': as a locus of received, and subjectively re-interpreted, cultural interpretations. This dialectical conception of the body as a nexus of culture and choice means that the idea of a 'natural' sex becomes increasingly suspect: if gender is a way of existing one's body, and one's body is a situation, a field of cultural possibilities both received and interpreted, then both gender and sex seem to be thoroughly cultural affairs.

Butler goes on to suggest that Wittig, though espousing a separatism political repugnant to de Beauvoir, makes this insight explicit in her

---

<sup>33</sup> Or it does unless it is assumed that the theory implicitly rests on the idea that it follows from the nature of the female body or psychic disposition that the nurturing of the species should hitherto have fallen almost exclusively to women.



argument that sexual demarcation follows from, rather than precedes, interpretation. This is so, not in the idealist sense that discourse about sex creates the misnomer of anatomy, but in the sense that certain anatomical features are viewed as definitional not only of biological sex but also of sexual identity. (We want, for example, to know what sex a child is in order to discover what sexual identity (= 'social destiny') he or she will have.) And this view, Butler claims, is supported by Foucault's rejection of 'natural sex' and of all binary oppositions in favour of a 'proliferation' of roles and identities to the point where opposition itself loses all purchase.<sup>34</sup>

Butler, as we have seen, accepts that this vision of a 'non-sexed' world is open to all the usual charges brought against 'existentialist' theses: from the Marxist that it ignores the extent to which others constitute one's gender in spite of any 'choices' of one's own;<sup>35</sup> from the Freudian, that it represents a fantasized regression to pre-oedipal sexual ambiguity, rather than the grounding for any genuine emancipation. In defence, she does no more than suggest rather archly that 'we might do well to urge speculation on the dynamic relation between fantasy and the realization of new social relations.'<sup>36</sup> Agreed, we might—indeed without a little fantasizing about how things might be otherwise, it seems unlikely that the political energy needed to remake social relations would ever be summoned forth. But the imagining of other possibilities has hitherto never managed to surmount the 'obstacle' of physical realities in their natural properties and causal relations, and in the case in question we must test for the 'seriousness' of Butler's fantasy against the reality of biology. Butler suggests, for example, that motherhood is entirely a matter of choice.<sup>37</sup> This is true in the general sense that most women can choose whether or not to have children. But apart from the fact that the infertile do not have such a choice, it is not so clear that we can choose, whatever our policy on motherhood, not to be subject to maternal instincts. In a general sense, there would seem to be biological dimensions to sexual attraction and parenthood (some of a kind we might well choose not to be pulled by if we could . . . ) which structure the modes in which we are enabled (or disabled) in 'existing' our bodies. Unless the kind of culturalism espoused by Butler is prepared to evacuate anatomical sex of all involuntary aspects (which would make sexual functioning, for example, of a completely different order from respiration), then the Wittig aspiration to a de-sexualized utopia would indeed seem to be unrealistic. It is also arguably dystopian in implying that heterosexual sex (which would seem to be a condition of any human continuity for the foreseeable future) is a mere norm. This

<sup>34</sup> Though Foucault of course differs from Wittig in also rejecting any Marcusean liberated 'eros' of the kind to which she aspires. For Foucault, the 'liberated eros' is always structured culturally and therefore saturated with the dynamics of a manipulative power. Cf. *Feminism as Critique*, p. 137.

<sup>35</sup> We might add, too, as part of the 'Marxist' objection, that it is not simply the objectifying 'gaze' of the other which limits 'choice' of gender; there are some very material economic and social factors which make any meaningful 'flexibility' in this matter well nigh impossible still for the majority of women.

<sup>36</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, p. 140.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

problem connects with Wittig's implicit privileging of lesbianism and of female self-affection in her conception of the pleasures of the 'unsexed' world—and with her highly problematic suggestion that the 'lesbian' is 'not a woman' but stands outside the gender binary system. But even if we allow that 'the lesbian' is definable other than by reference to the male–female distinction, why is male homosexuality excluded from this transcendence?

The fundamental question raised by Butler's account is why one can advocate a more 'poly-sexual' or 'sexually confused' future only from the standpoint of a 'culturist' account of gender formation which denies any necessary link between biological sex and genderization. Can we not, after all, acknowledge what seems very plausible: that there is an objective link (otherwise, why the gender grid at all?) which is massively overdetermined in the way it is lived, both by the specificity of genetic constitution and by the play of cultural power relations; and that the link between sex and gender should not therefore be accorded any great importance as such in our assessment of the possibilities of future sexual arrangements and desires?

This same question is raised, but left unanswered, in Cornell and Thurschwell's less 'unilateralist' (but rather dauntingly theoretical) advocacy of a gender reconciliation beyond any rigid male–female binary opposition. Actual sexuality, they imply, is always more blurred than our cultural symbolism would have it be, the feminine never wholly female, the male never wholly masculine. Emancipatory strategy should therefore be directed at a restitution, in consciousness as in social practice, of this more vague and nuanced, but never entirely undifferentiated eros. Their proposed forum is essentially Habermasian in character: psychoanalytic insight into the mediating role of language should make it possible to establish an 'ideal communication situation' freed of the rigid categories of structuralist feminisms such as Kristeva's (who, it is suggested, is compromised even in her opposition to Lacan's anti-feminism, by her reliance on his notion of Woman as otherness—as ineffable negation of male culture-discourse). For such structuralist essentialism of gender relations 'defeats the subversive power of the negative, and would cast women outside the masculine society they would disrupt.'<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 132. It is admitted that Kristeva is alert both to the risk of 'reification' ensuing from any Lacanian essentialism of the negative in the form of the feminine, and to the 'terrorism' of blanket negations of the actual to which it can lead both in theory and in political practice. But Cornell and Thurschwell argue that neither of her more 'positive' theoretical moves suffices to overcome these problems. Her appeal to the 'positives' immanent in the actual forms of motherhood and maternal modes of relating can proceed only at the cost of a conflation of 'Woman' with 'women' (and indeed with the particular empirical group of them who choose to be mothers)—and hence implies a political separatism. Her idea, on the other hand, of a 'semiotic' restoration of the 'She' which resides in all of us, is blocked by the Lacanian framework in which it is entertained. For insofar as this 'feminine' power is conceived as unassignable to any sex—as a power which 'no one represents and not women either'—it also falls outside the Symbolic order, and hence cannot be restored discursively. Once again, then, in language, symbolically, Woman does not exist, and there is no place for her to 'be' other than in the fantasy of pre-oedipal relations. Woman as a mature, non-regressive, non-fantastical principle of social life, is literally excluded from the very possibility of cultural presence by anyone, Kristeva included, who has recourse to the structuralist account of psychoanalysis.

From the standpoint, however, of an inter-subjective linguistic constitution of gender—which reintroduces the duality of world and language—we can begin to perceive that gender-differentiation is not exhaustive of actual human subjectivity, which is always more than, or 'in excess of', the strait-jacketing binary system of language. Or, in Adornian terms: 'the concept of gender can never be fully adequate to its masculine subject or feminine object.'<sup>39</sup> Thus, though supporting the psychoanalytic interpretation of the feminine as the 'negative' or escaped 'otherness', we might say that it is conceived not as the polar opposite of the 'masculine', but as a constantly disrupting 'otherness' which gives the lie to the supposedly univocal self-identity of a 'masculine' totality. The whole is not masculine, and feminine negativity surfaces as the immanent refusal and critique of this supposed 'truth'.<sup>40</sup>

Now, this is a perspective which seems to allow us to prise male domination away from gender differentiation, and hence frees us of the idea that a de-differentiated world is essential to the overthrow of patriarchy. On the other hand, when Cornell and Thurschwell proceed to denounce gender-difference as itself an evil, and aspire to Butler's 'non-sexed' world, they seem to be accepting similar culturist assumptions—that only by denying any biological base for gender distinction can we plausibly call for a less rigidly demarcated sexual universe. Their own account of gender difference would seem to suffer from some of the explanatory void that we have noted before. For I am not at all sure that they *do* show (as Cornell and Benhabib claim in their editorial introduction) that the gender divide is constituted only as an 'effect of multi-gendered, intersubjective relations that leave traces in everyone'. Does this not simply beg the question of why an inept binary grid was imposed upon an originary pluralism? Their appeal to a Hegelian account of the subjective constitution of identity would not seem to solve this problem, since it presupposes the 'mirror' of gender difference as that through which men and women have hitherto always had to establish an identity (even if the identity is arrived at only through a rejection of image).

Equally, however, it is questionable whether Cornell and Thurschwell are to be placed together with those (Fraser, Young and Butler) who are said in the introduction to see no utopian traces 'of a future mode of otherness' within the present forms of gender constitution. It is true that Cornell and Thurschwell join these other authors in offering a critique of the identity logic of binary oppositions; and in their final invocation of the Derridean dream of a place beyond all sexuality and its discriminating codes,<sup>41</sup> they certainly seem to aspire to the transcendence of all currently constituted modalities of sexual difference.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 139

<sup>40</sup> All this, of course, complies with Adorno's recommendation that 'Totality is to be opposed by convicting it of nonidentity with itself—of the nonidentity it denies according to its concept' (*Negative Dialectics*, London 1973, p. 147). But even Adorno relies too much, they suggest, on identity-thought's own version of itself, i.e. on the distinction it posits between self and alien, and is thus insufficiently alert to 'self-differentiation' of the subject. It is thus to Derrida that they finally refer themselves.

<sup>41</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, p. 162.

On the other hand, their 'Adornian' critique of Lacanian feminism is rooted in respect for an *immanent* critique—in respect, that is, for the possibilities of another ordering latent in the existing actuality. The logic of their argument against structuralism would thus seem to require that they problematize any notion of feminist transcendence.

The tension which Benhabib and Cornell rightly detect in the various arguments of *Feminism as Critique*—between those who see the desirable forms of gender relations already adumbrated in the present psychosexual arrangements, and those who aspire to a radical surpassing of the logic of binary oppositions altogether, and who see the current frozen grid of gender difference as offering no utopian escape routes whatsoever—this is a tension to be found actually *within* the arguments of Cornell and Thurschwell. Indeed, it is there within the pieces by Fraser, Young and Butler as well, insofar as they fail in the end to give content to their own 'utopian' categories. In the absence of any clearer sense of what is entertained under the notions of the 'multigendered' society, or the society of 'proliferating gender' or 'bodies and pleasures', one inevitably tends to conceive these as designating either a melange or blurring of existing sexual distinctions—which they therefore do not transcend—or else an alternative so devoid of specificity that it can hardly qualify even as fantasy.

### Feminism, Modernism and Beyond

Despite these reservations, the consistently high level of theoretical self-awareness, and of alertness to the political implications of the distinctions within the spectrum of feminist theory, makes this book a valuable contribution which takes us a move beyond existing divisions and tensions within contemporary feminism. In particular, one must welcome the insight it sheds on the relations between Marxism and Marxist-oriented argument, postmodernism and feminist theory.

Dissatisfaction with orthodox Marxism's gender-blindness and theoretical one-dimensionality has led many feminists over to the camp of structuralism and post-structuralism: to a deeper engagement with the seemingly more fruitful offerings of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Levi-Strauss's kinship theory, or Foucauldian and Derridean 'culturism'. But such moves are made only at the risk of being drawn into anti-emancipatory positions: either towards the necessitarian framework of structuralism's un-transcendable binary oppositions for which culture and discourse must remain unremittingly phallographic; or else towards a Foucauldian-Lyotardian scepticism, from whose standpoint the 'grand narratives' of transhistoric feminine oppression and patriarchal ordering, together with the aspiration to an 'end of oppression', manifest an erroneous (and inherently totalizing-totalitarian) commitment insofar as they must rest on a consensual claim to truth about what is wrong, and what needs to be done to correct it.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> It should be stressed, however, that in contrast to Foucault's pessimism about the inevitable cycle of domination, Lyotard explicitly aspires to a politics which 'would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown.' *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester 1986, p. 67.

In this context, the recourse to a body of theory which is both unapologetically revisionist from any Marxist perspective, but nonetheless emphatically anti-capitalist, oriented towards 'progressive' social transformation,<sup>43</sup> and committed to the discovery of a 'truth' (and a 'community' to replace the mere aggregations of people in systematically 'integrated' societies) must have obvious attractions for feminism. A gender-sensitized Habermasian theory of the kind sketched in several of the articles of *Feminism as Critique* must be thought to provide a promising alternative to the Hobson's choice between unreconstructed Marxism, and structuralism/post-structuralist fatalism and nihilism.

On the other hand, those who complain of Habermas's 'impartiality' and presumption of objective truth, and see in this not merely a gender-blindness but a structural incapacity of his categorial framework and epistemological disposition to accommodate a 'feminist' ethics, will inevitably be drawn to postmodernist discourses of 'proliferation' and 'pluralism'. In other words, those like Balbus, Markus and Benhabib who feel bound to seek for liberation in potentials immanent in existing society, will follow the bias of Critical Theory in using the values and tools of Enlightenment to criticize, subvert and transform the various irrationalities and oppressions perpetrated in its name—including, not least, the age-long subordination of women and devaluation of the 'feminine'. Those, on the other hand, who regard gender difference as infecting the very values of Enlightenment, such that justice, reason, freedom and objectivity can be seen as at the source of that subordination itself, will direct their sights to that ever-enticing yet ineffable utopia unmeasurable by all previous yardsticks. There is always the danger, however, that in contesting 'truth' in the name of progress one finds that one has 'proceeded' only back into oppression. It is worth recalling that when Lyotard, in his 'thinly-veiled' attack on Habermas,<sup>44</sup> contests the idea of 'consensus' as an 'outmoded and suspect value',<sup>45</sup> it is in the name of an 'agonistics' of speech whose presumption that in speaking we are always sparring with our adversary in a game of 'one-upmanship' is deeply antipathetic to feminism. Indeed, is it not the case that when we strip away the ludic affectations of this language-gaming, we are seeing a celebration of those old-fashioned, pompous, male adversarial modes which Virginia Woolf saw straight through back in the 1930s?

This is not to deny the importance of feminist questioning of the gender bias of traditional epistemological, metaphysical and moral categories, or the contribution in this respect of *Feminism as Critique* to a growing body of work which has taken 'feminist philosophy' well beyond its former preoccupation with revealing the all too predictable sexism of Plato, Hegel et alii. Nor do I want to suggest that a certain

<sup>43</sup> Though Habermas recognizes the difficulties around the notion of 'progress' and has argued in particular that it cannot be identified with the overcoming of the 'alienation' of labour. See Dewa, ed., op. cit., pp. 28f.

<sup>44</sup> So described by Fredric Jameson in his introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*, p. vii.

<sup>45</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 66, cf. pp. 10-16; 25; 57-9; 63-5.

wit and playful antagonism do not have a role in any amicable resolution around these matters. (Chaucer's Wife of Bath understood this well enough when she advised that 'Since a man's more reasonable, he should be the patient one.'<sup>46</sup>) I am suggesting only that we should be cautious lest the feminist critique of reason leaves us with no neutral space for either serious disagreement or ironic assent.

The issue here is not simply the incoherence of a feminist discourse which seeks our agreement to the idea that agreement is impossible, or which tries to reason us out of a commitment to reason. The point, rather, is that if one is going to challenge notions of 'impartiality', 'objectivity', 'justice', 'equality' and 'rationality' as incompatible with the 'particularist' and 'caring and nurturing' priorities of a feminist ethic, one should be quite clear about the epistemological and moral and political implications. Epistemologically, the challenge implies the elision of reality and appearance, an outright subjectivism, an equivalence of all 'biases' and 'partialities'. This is surely not what most feminists want since it would make their viewpoint but one among many of equal validity (or futility). Instead, it has to be recognized that one cannot seriously engage with gender 'bias' or offer grounds for defending the call for it to be corrected, except on the assumption of an impartial and objective mode of relating. Politically and morally, this in turn implies a commitment to the principle of justice as that which grounds the demand for an end to discrimination, not only against women but against any marginalized or oppressed grouping. Liberal theory has obviously thought justice is detachable from equality in the sense that it regards any society as just which respects the rights of each individual to his or her property, freedom and protection before the law. In practice, such a conception of the just society serves to reinforce the vast disparities of property and freedom of the market society, and feminists are right to denounce the 'abstract' (but implicitly middle-class, male, property-owning individual) who is posited as the representative of humanity at large by such rights-based theories of justice.

But one must be careful, all the same, to distinguish between the exposure of this kind of abstraction from differences of gender, status, race, etc. and denunciation of all ethical abstractions altogether as inherently and undesirably 'masculinist': for that would mean depriving the feminist ethic of the grounds for calling for any kind of social norms, moral codes or legal rulings at all. If it is being suggested that we fall into a dubiously 'male', authoritarian and instrumental form of reasoning the moment we abstract from the specifically situated and unique position of the individual, the moment, in other words, we overlook difference, then obviously no comparisons between us can be made of the kind essential to legislation or to a more equal social distribution of goods, resources and opportunities. In short, this kind of 'difference' feminism, if taken to its ultimate conclusion, must condone an anarchist and wholly de-regulated economic and

---

<sup>46</sup> 'Oon of us two mooste bowen, doutelees;/ And arth a man is more resonable/ Than womman is, ye mooste been suffrable.' 'The Wife of Bath Prologue', *The Canterbury Tales* (in Modern English trans. Nevill Coghill, Penguin edition, 1951, p. 288).

social policy: and again, we must ask whether this—with its obvious neo-rightist overtones—is what feminists are wanting.

For all these reasons, those who argue, like Benhabib and Markus, that the core of present conceptions of justice and equality needs to be retained as the condition of future emancipation, seem to me to have the interests of the vast majority of women more closely at heart than those holding out the promise of a utopia of multiplying difference.

Finally, in this connection let me note two related reservations I have about much of the theory offered in *Feminism as Critique*. In the first place, there is the problem of its own relative abstraction and difficulty. Just as it has been asked of Habermas's theory for whom it is intended and who is conceived as the agent of its 'communicative' revolution, so of this feminist critique, one can ask: who will read and understand it and how does it relate to the practical changes needed to implement quite minor improvements in the lives of the most severely economically and socially oppressed women? (The same question, I accept, can be addressed to this review.)

It is true, of course, that theory is important, and if there was ever an area where it might be claimed that change in the modes of thinking and talking had issued in material re-arrangements, it is that of sexual politics, and the initial theorists of the feminist movement must take much of the credit for this. But as feminist argument becomes more complex and meta-theoretical (because more alert to the conceptual difficulties unearthed by its earlier critiques), so it will need also to be more sensitive to the risk of losing sight of the original goals.

This brings me to a second difficulty: that of the under-theorized relationship between feminist theory and empirical social science. One comes away from *Feminism as Critique* feeling quite positive about its undogmatic stance and readily admitted ambivalences about future directions; but also feeling that rather little other than one's own subjectivity (including perhaps one's own desire and sexual situation) are considered relevant in helping to decide the issue. One key problem, in short, which is raised through the feminist critique of science and its standard philosophical underpinnings is how far feminist discourses are aspiring to any scientific status (in the sense of seeing themselves as open to empirical controls and seeking their validation); how far they are happy to settle for a post-structuralist perspectivism. Towards the conclusion of her article in *Feminism as Critique*, Josephine Butler asks: 'When the essential feminine is finally articulated, and what we have been calling "women" cannot see themselves in its terms, what then are we to conclude? That these are deluded, or that they are not women at all?'<sup>47</sup> The point is well taken: one does not want an arbitrary essentialism to foreclose what women can be. But equally one does not want to lend oneself to the kind of anti-naturalism and anti-objectivity which removes all grounds for discriminating between what can truly or falsely be said of women. Or at least, I do not. Let me conclude, then, by revamping Butler's question: if one

---

<sup>47</sup> *Feminism as Critique*, p. 142.

does not see oneself entirely through the gaze of feminist self-affection; if one's intuition is that objectivity and truth must be preserved against deconstruction; if one even follows Habermas in his 'stubbornly Kantian' desire to 'preserve a sense that questions of truth can be isolated and a discourse kept open where it is not mixed with questions of justice and taste'—what then?<sup>48</sup> Is one deluded, or not properly feminist? Or, more happily, but perhaps still not good enough, is one tolerated but only as one of many equally valid voices?

---

<sup>48</sup> Dews, ed., op cit., p. 127.

**Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture:  
The Importance of Being Marxist**

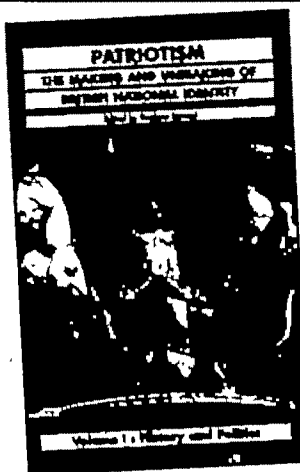
Boris Kagarlitsky, winner of the 1988 Prize and author of *The Thinking Reed*, an account of Soviet intellectual life since the Revolution, will deliver the memorial lecture in London in mid-September.

As a date had not been fixed when this issue of the Review went to the printers, please consult the weekly press in early September.



*This blessed plot, this earth,  
this realm, this England?*

# PATRIOTISM



The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity

**Volume 1: History and Politics**

**Volume 2: Minorities and Outsiders**

**Volume 3: National Fictions**

*Edited by Raphael Samuel,  
Ruskin College, Oxford*

An ambitious appraisal of the power of the national idea through a historically informed critique.

**Contributors** include: Beatrix Campbell, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Alan Howkins, Gareth Stedman Jones, Hanif Kureishi, Tom Nairn, Anne Summers, Jeffrey Weeks.

*History Workshop*

May

Volume 1

352pp: Hb: 0-415-02772-1: £30.00:

Pb: 0-415-01307-0: £12.95

Volume 2

304pp: Hb: 0-415-02773-X: £30.00:

Pb: 0-415-01302-X: £12.95

Volume 3

304pp: Hb: 0-415-02774-8: £30.00:

Pb: 0-415-02611-3: £12.95

**R**  
**Routledge**

For further information, or a complete  
Routledge history list, please contact  
Rachel Mizand, Promotions Department,  
Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London  
EC4P 4EE



NOW PUBLISHED  
BY GUILFORD

# SCIENCE & SOCIETY

An Independent Journal of Marxism

Edited by David Goldway

**S**CIENCE & SOCIETY is an interdisciplinary journal of Marxist thought and analysis. Now in its 53rd year, it seeks original scholarship in: political economy and the economic analysis of contemporary capitalist and socialist societies; philosophy and methodology in the natural and social sciences; history, labor, black and women's studies; aesthetics, literature and the arts. Especially welcomed is theoretical and applied research which both breaks new ground in a particular discipline and is intelligible and useful to non-specialists.

While the journal does not adhere to any particular school of contemporary Marxist discussion, or attempt to delineate precise boundaries for Marxism, it does encourage contributors, where appropriate, to establish the relationship of their work to the classical writings of Marxism, as well as to the current literature in their subject area.

## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Volume 53 (4 issues), 1989, ISSN 0036-8237  
Institutions: \$45.00 Individuals: \$15.00  
Outside U.S., add \$10.00 (includes surface mail).



**GUILFORD PUBLICATIONS, INC.** Dept 7 M  
72 Spring Street, New York, N.Y. 10012  
CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-365-7000 (In NY, call 212-431-8000)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt # \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Daytime Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

### METHOD OF PAYMENT

☐ Check or Money Order enclosed ☐ Institutional PO Attached  
BILL MY ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA ☐ American Express

Acct # \_\_\_\_\_  
Exp \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
(Required for credit card orders)

☐ YES, please enter my subscription to SCIENCE & SOCIETY,  
Volume 53 (4 issues), 1989, ISSN 0036-8237, Cat. #7500  
Please indicate subscription type below

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual subscription at \$15.00  
\_\_\_\_\_ Institutional subscription at \$45.00

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Amount  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Outside the U.S. add \$15.00 (airmail included)  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL

To order outside the U.S., contact The Guilford Press,  
Distribution Centre, Blackhorse Road, Letchworth,  
Herts SG6 1HN, United Kingdom

NOTE: YOU MAY USE A PHOTOCOPY IN PLACE OF THIS COUPON

review

Joseph McCarney

## For and Against Althusser

Gregory Elliott's book appears at a time when the reputation of its subject seems near to total eclipse.<sup>1</sup> In Althusser's own country he is, as Elliott reports, practically a 'dead dog', buried beneath 'the settled anti-Marxist consensus among the majority of the French intelligentsia'.<sup>2</sup> In Britain he is 'largely absent from current Marxist debate, the high ground of which is occupied by an Analytical current that has declined a critical engagement with him'.<sup>3</sup> For Elliott this consignment to oblivion affords an opportunity, 'the resurrection of Althusser's intellectual and political career *as history*'. It makes possible a 'reassessment' of his work, a 'more equitable presentation and appraisal' of it than has hitherto been available. Elliott believes that such a 'return to and reconsideration of Althusser would have a large significance. In particular, it 'may aid a fuller appreciation' of 'some of the background to the present acute crisis of Marxism'.<sup>4</sup> It seems obvious that Elliott has set himself an ambitious and important undertaking. It promises a balanced view of a thinker who has been subjected to irrational extremes of abuse and adulation. Moreover, it offers the prospect of shedding a general light on pressing issues of contemporary intellectual life on the Left.

The book carries the dedication 'To Louis Althusser', and this somewhat curious circumstance prefigures the sympathy and inwardness Elliott brings to his task. He has a deep understanding of the intellectual and political background from which Althusser sprang and of the nature of the theoretical project that was conceived against it. Elliott accepts the validity and significance of this project, and deals in detail with the vicissitudes of its implementation and the changes that thereby came about in the conception itself. His work is a sustained and comprehensive example of immanent critique, a critique focused on the internal coherence of its object and on the gap in it between aspiration and performance. The critique is carried out with great thoroughness, analytical acuity and scrupulous attention to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Dilemma of Theory*, Verso, London 1987, pp. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

evidence of the texts. The results have a weight, at times a definitiveness, unrivalled in the literature on Althusser. It is no more than the plain truth to say that Elliott has placed all future students in his debt and that his work will be indispensable to them. Yet it may be doubted whether it is altogether successful by its own exacting, immanent standards. That is to say, it is doubtful whether it fully realizes the goal of resurrecting Althusser's career 'as history', and thus of drawing its chief lessons for the 'crisis of Marxism'. Misgivings on this score have two immediate sources. The first is the reverse side, as it were, of the advantages prefigured in the dedication. Stated crudely, it is that Elliott may be too close to his subject to permit the degree of detachment appropriate to situating his career in historical perspective. The second is that, somewhat paradoxically, he may turn out to be too close also to current forms of conventional wisdom about that career. The first of these factors leads him to be over-indulgent of demonstrated inadequacies, and the second causes him to fall somewhat short of the measure of Althusser's achievement as a whole. Thus, the two tend to work against each other, and they mark the site of a structural tension in Elliott's discussion. Both are, as we shall see, made possible only by his recurring reluctance to trust to, and follow through, the logic of his own detailed arguments.

### A Balanced Critique

The reluctance is most evident on occasions when Elliott rounds off the treatment of some aspect of Althusser's work with a seemingly judicious balancing of praise and censure. This symmetry regularly turns out to be misleading in that the censure is precisely aimed and solidly grounded in the discussion, while the praise is unfocused and at odds with what has gone before. A couple of illustrations will have to suffice here. An incisive critique of Althusser's 'epistemological project' is supplemented by the observation that 'At the same time, all credit is owed to him for a pioneering initiative in epistemology from within Marxism'.<sup>5</sup> Yet the entire tendency of the critique itself had been to show that what is pioneering in Althusser's epistemology cannot properly be described as arising 'within Marxism'. It represents precisely a turning to sources outside, above all to Spinoza and Bachelard. Thus, the critique serves to give substance to Elliott's earlier acceptance of Martin Jay's view that Althusser was 'the most promiscuous [of Western Marxists] in allowing non-Marxist influences to affect his ideas'.<sup>6</sup> In the case under discussion his promiscuity generates what Elliott acknowledges to be a 'contradiction', an 'unresolved tension' between Marxist and non-Marxist elements in his thought. The result is that while claiming to have solved 'intractable problems in the philosophy of science', he had in truth 'either offered unsatisfactory answers or dissolved the very questions'.<sup>7</sup> This verdict seems entirely justified in itself, but it sits oddly with the attempt to assign credit which Elliott immediately appends to it. The attempt is in the circumstances unconvincing.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

A second example arises from a similar tension, that between Althusser's Marxism and his structuralism. Elliott is inclined to agree with Andrew Levine's conclusion that, in its structuralist aspect, Althusserianism was part of 'a revolt against historical materialism'.<sup>8</sup> For Althusser and Balibar were, in Elliott's view, 'fundamentally revising Marx where they professed to be returning to him'. This seems uncompromising enough. Yet, when it comes to a summing up, an impression of punches being pulled is once more given: 'whatever the flaws in Althusser's reconstruction of historical materialism, and however tenuous its title to orthodoxy, it represented, and was widely experienced as, a liberation'.<sup>9</sup> On Elliott's own showing, however, this work is to be regarded as a revolt against, or fundamental revision of, historical materialism, and, if this is so, the term 'reconstruction' is simply inappropriate here. Moreover, Elliott has provided excellent grounds for supposing that its title to orthodoxy is not merely tenuous but is actually without merit. Nothing has survived of it under the rigours of his scrutiny.

It has to be asked why Elliott should seek to dull the edge of his own demonstrations. A clue to at least part of the answer is perhaps to be found in the reference to the experience of Althusser's work as a 'liberation'. Elliott expands the point by asserting that Althusser's criticisms 'released Marxists from more than one conceptual prison, re-establishing historical materialism as a research programme', and 'reminded Marxists that there was a continent waiting to be explored'.<sup>10</sup> What seems excessive tenderness is due in some measure, one might suppose, to respect and gratitude for an influence exerted in a particular historical conjuncture. It would be difficult for anyone on the Left in Britain who began to think for themselves in the decade or so from the mid-sixties onwards not to sympathize with such a motive. In that time and place Althusser's work was indeed a liberation. Apart from all substantive doctrines, this was so in virtue of its simple insistence on taking Marx seriously, on establishing his right to the same quality of attention as any other figure in the philosophical tradition. The message owed much of its impact to Althusser's personal attributes, to his own deep seriousness and magisterial self-assurance, his peculiar density of texture and authority of tone and his remarkable skills as a rhetorician and phrase-maker. It is true that there was a negative side to his influence. As many observers have noted, British Althusserianism soon assumed a scholastic, even sectarian character. It is also the case that for some of its leading representatives the conceptual prison from which they were eventually to be released was Marxism itself. Nevertheless, the somewhat histrionic course of their emancipation had its own particular interest and exemplary value. Moreover, Althusser was himself largely unscathed by this development, partly at least because of his apparent reluctance to acknowledge his British disciples, still more to confer on them any right of apostolic succession. No sect will thrive in these circumstances, and, as the wind changed in academia and outside during the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 184-85.

eighties, the British branch of 'high Althusserianism' folded almost as quickly as it had arisen. Some of the gains from the reception of Althusser's work in Britain were, however, permanent. It is difficult to see how there could even now be a return to the complacent ignorance and incomprehension which, in the pre-Althusser period, characterized the work of analytical commentators on Marx. Some at least of the credit is due to the Althusserian role in shifting him nearer the centre of the intellectual stage. There were in addition some significant British contributions to the process of continental exploration to which Elliott refers.

Elliott attempts to establish 'the continuing productivity and vitality of the Althusserian research programme' through a lengthy citation of writings in the social sciences, philosophy, historiography, aesthetics, cultural studies, literary criticism and feminist theory. Impressive as the list is, it is impossible not to have some reservations concerning it. For one thing, the criteria for inclusion are generously vague and yield somewhat motley results. Thus, to stay with the British contingent, it will be obvious to any reader of Roy Bhaskar's *A Realist Theory of Science* and John Taylor's *From Modernization to Modes of Production* that these remarkable works could be said to exemplify an 'Althusserian research programme' only in quite different usages of that description. Moreover, one may well suspect that in many other cases a closer look would reveal that its application in any usage is problematic. Thus, the best-known name on the list is perhaps that of Nicos Poulantzas. Yet in a recent study, described by Elliott as 'important work', Bob Jessop has painstakingly and persuasively argued that Althusserian influence on Poulantzas was never dominant and was steadily eliminated as he found his own voice and, hence, that the usual reading of him as an Althusserian structuralist is mistaken.<sup>11</sup> It is also worth noting that even where the main impulse is undeniably received from Althusser, it often develops against the grain of his thought and in ways not countenanced or adumbrated there.<sup>12</sup> It is, of course, possible to make too much of reservations of this sort. The need for them may, after all, be in some sense inescapable, or, at any rate, only to be expected. That historical significance has to be read out of silence, rejection and misappropriation is a fate by no means unique to Althusser. It does not impugn his claim to an enduring place in the history of Marxist thought, and that claim may fairly be said to have been convincingly re-affirmed by Elliott's discussion.

### A Career as History

This achievement has, however, only a minor significance for the task of resurrecting Althusser's career as history, as Elliott conceives it.

<sup>11</sup> Bob Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy*, London 1985, see esp. pp. 14-15, 53, 82, 134-35, 317-18.

<sup>12</sup> As Elliott in effect recognizes. 'The single most important achievement of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* was to help renew Marxism—often in spite of Althusser's epistemological protocols and in directions unforeseen by him.' Elliott, p. 331.

What is crucial for the task is the 'equitable appraisal' of a body of work. Such an appraisal may now be thought to be needed more than ever. It is needed if one is to have a means of dealing with the suggestion, which is bound to arise, that all the Althusserian researchers are in fact barking up the wrong tree. At this point, however, the basic tension in the structure of Elliott's study begins to make itself felt. The tension may be seen from one standpoint as arising in the following way. As has already been indicated, not much survives of what might be thought of as classic Althusserian positions—roughly speaking those taken up in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*—once they have passed through the mill of Elliott's analysis. Again and again key doctrines and concepts are shown to be incoherent, undertheorized, inadequate to their objects or in some other way untenable. These positions were, of course, subjected to criticism by Althusser himself, and some elements of it chime with Elliott's findings. Yet the later career, from the self-criticism onwards, wins from Elliott a markedly unenthusiastic, indeed negative, response. He treats it as essentially a process of intellectual decline, of a systematic loss of novelty and power.<sup>3</sup> The structural tension here may be said to take the form of an incongruity between the actual substance of his commentary and his abiding, and overriding, sense of the intrinsic significance of Althusser's achievement. There seems little hope of lessening the tension by seeking to undo the demolition of classic Althusserianism. It will be more rewarding to look again at the later career, for this may well deserve a warmer welcome than Elliott provides. His predicament arises, one might suggest, because he takes too conventional, too straightforwardly 'Western Marxist', a view of this part of the story, and is in consequence frequently apologetic where he should have been celebratory. To make the issues manageable here, one will have to take a single, though uncontentionally central, theme as the yardstick of Althusser's progress. An obvious choice is the question of the status of Marxist social theory and, specifically, of its relationship to practice. The problem is set by the fact that Marx and later Marxists have characteristically not been content to accept, in the manner of bourgeois philosophy of science, that the relationship of their social theory to its object is simply explanatory. It has also in some sense an inescapably practical, indeed revolutionary, dimension. The question to be asked is what this sense amounts to: precisely how is the theory to be conceived of as contributing to, or informing, the movement for socialism?

The answers available to Althusser are constrained by his consistent refusal to go down one particularly inviting and well-trodden path. Throughout his career he has disavowed any normative dimension to Marxist science, even, as Elliott somewhat disapprovingly notes, 'any indictment of capitalism's inhumanity and injustice'.<sup>4</sup> His intransigence on the issue is well captured in an anecdote of an ex-student, Pierre Victor, which is retold by Elliott: 'I said to him that if people were communists, it was for the sake of happiness. In substance his

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 199, 270, 313.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

reply was: You mustn't say that. It is in order to bring about a change of mode of production. . . .'<sup>5</sup>

This formulation gives rise to a problem of rendering intelligible the purposive activity of the communists, and, in particular, of grasping how it is that for them a theory of modes of production is connected with the springs of action. In rejecting the idea that it is through the mediation of a normative ideal, Althusser is rejecting the standard solution of Western Marxism. In this tradition socialist theory has usually been taken, implicitly or explicitly, as in essence a normative critique of capitalist society. Such a critique is assumed to have a practical, and not simply explanatory, significance in virtue of providing its audience with reasons for acting to change that society. In repudiating this view Althusser is squarely in line with the consistent and unequivocal stance of Marx himself. Whenever he addresses the issue he emphatically denies that his science has any reliance on normative appeals, and he condemns socialist theorists who do rely on them.<sup>6</sup> Althusser's deep feeling for, and loyalty to, this fundamental aspect of Marx's thought is one, wholly honourable, source of the stressful and refractory character of his intellectual development.

In Althusser's earlier work the relationship between theory and practice is understood, as Elliott's account makes clear, in technical or instrumental terms.<sup>7</sup> The theory is a neutral body of scientific knowledge which renders more effective the practice of any politics to which it can be externally harnessed. Elliott shows that what underlies this conception in Althusser is the thesis of 'relative autonomy': 'theory had to secure recognition of its justified claims to relative autonomy—precisely in order to fulfil its proper function as a "guide" for practice.'<sup>8</sup> There has been much debate as to what 'relative autonomy' can, or should, mean. Elliott cuts through these tangles to argue that, in its operational aspect, 'relative autonomy took the form of absolute autonomy and omnipotence'.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in his final summing up, he takes the doctrine of the autonomy of theory to be one of Althusser's best achievements: 'Above all, the first version of Althusserian philosophy had the considerable merit of insisting on the cognitive autonomy of scientific theory (albeit by granting it independence from the non-theoretical). . . .'<sup>10</sup> Elliott is speaking here with the voice of what may be regarded as the current consensus among sympathetic critics of Althusser. Thus, the main aim of Michael Sprinker's discussion of these matters is 'to insist once more on the evaluation of Althusser's project in terms of the relative

---

<sup>5</sup> Loc. cit., n. 235

<sup>6</sup> Norman Geras has demonstrated with particular clarity that 'early and late' Marx's denials in this matter are 'quite general in scope' and that his 'impatience with the language of norms and values is global in range'. 'The Controversy About Marx and Justice', *New Left Review* 130, March/April 1985, pp. 84–85. It should be said that Geras is not willing to take Marx's denials and impatience at face-value, and his arguments on this point should be consulted by anyone interested in the issue.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Elliott, pp. 113, 143

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 329.



autonomy of theory'. Indeed, Sprinker takes Elliott to task for discounting relative autonomy in the course of his excessively 'political' reading of Althusser, a reading which ties theoretical developments too closely to political positions.<sup>21</sup> This is surely a curious situation.

What these writers are in their different ways singling out for praise is a feature of Althusser's work which can contribute little to his stature as a Marxist philosopher. On the other hand, the 'cognitive autonomy' of theory is a familiar tenet of bourgeois ideology, and one which is effortlessly realized every day by the most mediocre bourgeois thinkers. Moreover, the writers in question see themselves as standing in some close and positive relationship to both Marx and Althusser. The suggestion seems irresistible that we have here a characteristic manifestation of the latter-day Western Marxist tradition, an almost too schematic image of its long accommodation to bourgeois modes of thought and, above all, of the 'first and most fundamental' of its specific substantive traits, 'the structural divorce of this Marxism from political practice.'<sup>22</sup> The situation is most curious in the case of Elliott in view of his understanding of what relative autonomy means, and in view also, it should be said, of his uniquely sustained attempt to capture the true inwardness of Althusser's career. Elliott has traced at length the process by which Althusser came to think that his earlier position had to be abandoned, that it was not a merit in it to have 'disarticulated' the 'particular relationship between Marxist theory and the working-class movement', and, in doing so, to have 'passed over in silence' important ideas of Marx and Engels on this relationship.<sup>23</sup> Althusser's breaking of the silence in the course of his self-criticism is surely to be regarded as a considerable personal, and intellectual, achievement. In the light of it, the trouble with Elliott's reading is that it is not political, and thereby immanent, enough. It fails, one may argue, precisely in the degree to which it takes on the shallow outlook of conventional criticism in place of the profound, truly radical and energetically developing one of its subject.

### A Course of Self-Criticism

Althusser's self-criticism has two main, interconnected aspects, the much greater prominence accorded to class struggle and the recognition of the theoretical significance of class perspectives. The first finds its most striking expression in the new definition of philosophy not as the 'theory of theoretical practice' but as 'in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory'.<sup>24</sup> The second is crystallized in the insistence that historical materialism is framed from, and gives voice to, the class standpoint of the proletariat.<sup>25</sup> There is much to admire in the process of development leading to these results. It is for one thing a record of intellectual integrity and commitment. The emphasis

---

<sup>21</sup> Michael Sprinker, *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism*, Verso, London 1987, pp. 179, 233. See also Ted Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and his Influence*, London 1984, esp. pp. 88–96.

<sup>22</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, NLB, London 1976, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Elliott, pp. 205, 130.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

on class struggle was a response to 'more politically-oriented' critics who had complained of its absence from the earlier writings. These complaints derived their force from a view of what it was to be a Marxist in philosophy which Althusser could not disavow. Yet in yielding to them he was giving up positions which were still the focus of intense, subtle and apparently unresolved debate, a kind of transition which is more unusual than it should be in intellectual life. It may also be shown to involve a 'return to Marx' in a more authentic sense than anything represented by Althusser's first essays. The shift from absence to insistent presence in the case of class struggle is plainly a move towards Marx's idea of the significance of this factor. Moreover the new interpretation of the logical status of Marxist theory is an echo of certain canonical formulations on the subject by its founder. Again and again in Marx's moments of metatheoretical reflection he returns to the notion that socialist theory simply is the expression or mouthpiece of a movement of reality, the movement of proletarian self-emancipation.<sup>26</sup> The notion is neither so perspicuous nor so articulated as one could wish, and this state of affairs was not to be greatly altered by Althusser's coming to adopt it. Nevertheless, it remains the case that from a Marxist standpoint his career exemplifies a classic pattern of development in that what he achieved was to 'wither into the truth'. This must always be for a philosopher a more important consideration than conceptual display, or even than genuine power and novelty. For a dialectical philosopher issues of truth are inextricably bound up with issues of the objectification of truth in reality. In both these crucial respects Althusser's development is a getting of wisdom, a deepening awareness of the nature of his intellectual inheritance and of the demands of the historical situation in which he found himself.

It is a developmental process which has, like any other, its inherent limitations. They arise, as one might expect, from the unbroken grip of the past in certain key areas. What chiefly remains locked in its dead hand are features of Althusser's thought which are familiar from numerous commentaries, the overwhelmingly epistemological character of his philosophical project and the specific shape his epistemology takes. In this context he emerges as a quintessentially Western Marxist thinker. His career might have been designed to point the moral of the 'marked predominance of epistemological work' within that historical tendency.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Althusserian epistemology is irredeemably 'positivist' in a strict sense of that term, the sense of the tradition of Comte and Bachelard. It takes science to be the only authentic form of human knowledge, and conceives the task of philosophy as being to exhibit and preserve this status through its strict demarcation of knowledge from all varieties of error and illusion. This conception survives essentially intact into the later phases of

---

<sup>26</sup> K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Moscow 1955, p. 109, K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Harmondsworth 1967, pp. 95-96. Some further relevant passages are cited by Elliott in support of his recognition that in the later period 'Althusser unequivocally assented to views—from which he had previously dissented—entertained by Marx himself on the relationship between historical materialism and the workers' movement.' *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, p. 93; see also pp. 52-53 and 92.

Althusser's work. There is, as it were, no 'epistemological break' in it, and this fact has itself a wider significance. It is a reminder of the limits of what may be expected of any time-bound individual life, and, hence, a rebuke to the melodramatic schematism of Althusser's conception of the 'break' in Marx's case as utter diremption and discontinuity. Some consequences of the inner continuity of his own career should now be noted.

### The Science/Ideology Antithesis

It is symptomatic that it is specifically philosophy that is in the later period thrown into the struggle between classes; philosophy which, we are told, 'is not (a) science but class struggle in theory'.<sup>28</sup> The plain implication here, as throughout the later writings, is that 'science, even Marxist science, is *not* class struggle in theory', and so the new conception of philosophy, like the old, 'protects the peculiarly theoretical status of science itself'.<sup>29</sup> What it protects it from in particular is the burden of the political responsibilities urged by Althusser's critics. These responsibilities are acknowledged in his self-criticism, but their discharge is, as it were, displaced onto philosophy. An even more striking positivist survival in the later work is the 'cardinal principle' of the earlier epistemology itself, the distinction between science and ideology conceived as a distinction between what is and what is not cognitively satisfactory in thought and in the lived relationship to the world.<sup>30</sup> It might have been supposed that this principle would prove particularly vulnerable in a process of returning to Marx, with its suggestion of greater sensitivity to what he actually thought and wrote. For neither Althusser nor anyone else has produced a shred of textual evidence to show that the science/ideology contrast has any theoretical significance for him. A conception of these categories in antithetical terms seems clearly incompatible with his use of them in concrete situations.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it is decisively ruled out by his best-known and most explicit dealings with the notion of the ideological.

These occur in the 'Preface' of 1859 to *A Contribution to the Critique of*

<sup>28</sup> Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, NLB, London 1976, p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Roy Edgley, 'Marx's Revolutionary Science', in J. Mepham and D-H. Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, Vol. 3, Brighton 1979, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> The 'antithesis science/ideology' must be 'rejected' only 'in its *general*, rationalist-speculative form', in order that it may be 'reworked' from another point of view'. Althusser, pp. 147-48. The reworking was not carried out by Althusser and one cannot be sure precisely what he had in mind. It seems clear, nevertheless, that it would have to register the old epistemological hierarchy in some form. 'Ideology' continues to be used pejoratively in the later work, and theory has still to achieve an epistemological break with its ideological origins in order to be constituted as science. Althusser, pp. 78-79, 116, 126, 151, 157, 160, 173; see also n. 33 below.

<sup>31</sup> A striking instance is provided by the treatment of classical political economy. Thus, the work of Ricardo is regarded by Marx as both 'scientific' and 'ideological'. But this is surely not to be explained in terms of the possibility of using a science/ideology antithesis to partition it. The descriptions pertain to the work as a whole in virtue of its own nature. The secret of that nature lies in a set of circumstances much emphasized by Marx, that Ricardo's work is conceived from the epistemologically privileged standpoint of a rising class and that it assumes the world of that class to be the authentic, eternally valid mode of human social existence.

*Political Economy*. In this text the 'ideological forms' are directly associated not with cognitive failure but with what must in some sense be cognitive success: it is in them that 'men become conscious' of the fundamental social conflict. More significantly, it is evident that all parties to the conflict are envisaged as having to 'fight it out' in these forms.<sup>32</sup> Yet Marx is far from supposing that all are similarly enmeshed in distorted or illusory views of the social world. On the contrary, he assumes that one side, that of the proletariat, will be armed with such insights into the nature of that world as he had devoted his life to providing. The implication of what might be called the cognitive neutrality of ideology is unmistakable. In a remarkable late text, 'Le Marxisme Aujourd'hui', Althusser comes firmly and characteristically to grips with this challenge. In the 1859 'Preface', he declares: 'Marx considers his ideas no longer as explanatory principles of the given whole, but solely in relation to their possible action in the ideological struggle. Therewith they also change form, passing from the theory-form to the ideological form.'<sup>33</sup>

This is surely one of the most extraordinary moments in the history of Western Marxism. At any rate nothing could illustrate more dramatically the enduring hold of the science/ideology antithesis on Althusser, nor the consequences of his remaining subject to it. Faced with incontrovertible evidence that Marx regarded his own ideas as ideological, Althusser's response is not to question his 'cardinal principle' but, in the light of it, to consign these ideas to the side of action and struggle while cancelling their explanatory and theoretical status. Pointing the moral of this moment in the starkest terms, it may be said that when finally compelled to choose between his positivism and his loyalty to Marx, he chooses positivism. It is from one point of view a tribute to the perverse integrity of his thought. Yet it is also the case that he had little alternative here in view of a commitment even more fundamental than that to the science/ideology antithesis. This is the commitment to the epistemological reduction of philosophy which underlies it. For it left him without the resources necessary to conceptualize a body of work which is, at one and the same time and in virtue of its own unitary nature, both descriptive and dynamic, both theory and ideology. It left him, that is to say, without the means of doing justice to the scale and integrity of Marx's achievement. Even the first step towards the integration of this whole must fall outside the bounds of a conception of philosophy as epistemology.

The issues involved here may become clearer if one considers the furthest point attained in Althusser's late return to Marx, the idea of theory as the elaboration of a class standpoint. However welcome this may be, it does nothing of itself to vindicate for theory a practical, as well as explanatory, character. A class theoretical standpoint may be simply a location in conceptual space from which veridical views are obtainable. It remains to be shown how the theory developed from such a standpoint connects with the springs of class action. For Marx and Althusser this is emphatically not through the mediation of

---

<sup>32</sup> K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow 1970, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Elliott, p. 317.

values. The modality in which the practical force of theory is exerted cannot be that of an 'ought'. It is difficult to see what it conceivably could be, other than some form of 'natural' or 'ontological' necessity. This suggestion will have to be drawn out here by means of an analogy.<sup>34</sup> In the case of individual human subjects there is no obligation to take the question 'What ought I to do in this situation?' as the only formulation of the problem of practical reason. Indeed, an alternative, which is, roughly speaking, Aristotelian rather than Kantian in its philosophical associations, may well correspond better to many people's experience of the actual weight and complexity of practical dilemmas. It is the question 'What must I do in this situation in virtue of being the person I am?' Finding an answer to this question is more like a process of cognitive discovery, both self-discovery and the disclosure of the objective world in which the self is situated, than it is like one of normative reflection on the intimations of an ideal. It may reasonably be regarded as a possible model for the case of collective subjects also. At any rate some such conception seems to be presupposed in statements like the following: 'It is not a question of what this or that proletariat, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is* and what, in accordance with this *being* (*Sein*), it will historically be compelled to do.'<sup>35</sup>

The reference to what the proletariat will be compelled to do exemplifies the kind of necessity that is relevant here, a necessity grounded in the nature of subjects of action. The revelation of 'being' and its requirements must, for the proletariat in the mystified conditions of class society, draw on the help of theory. It involves an unmasking of the phenomenal forms of the society, a going behind its appearances to the reality, which is by definition a scientific achievement. The suggestion that now arises is that the practical significance of theory consists in its indispensable role in forming and transforming, through its cognitive power, the consciousness and action of historical subjects. To suggest this is itself merely to indicate a programme for research. Marx did not in his own work go far beyond programmatic announcements and, in spite of some valuable contributions, it can hardly be contended that the omission has been repaired by his successors. In this perspective Marxist philosophy has still, just as Althusser insists, largely to be constituted.<sup>36</sup> Its constitution will, however, fall primarily within the realm of social ontology, and, specifically, of the ontology of class subjects. Since it is a 'historical' compulsion that works on them, and since the general framework within which it works has to be determined, it will also be important to advance positions within the philosophy of history. It is at any rate clear that the goal is not to be realized through epistemological research alone, and, *a fortiori*, not by means of an epistemology conceived as an outer rampart behind which science shelters from the exigencies of the practical world. To

<sup>34</sup> A full-scale theoretical treatment is attempted in Joseph McCartney, *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism*, Verso, forthcoming.

<sup>35</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism*, Moscow 1965, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> Elliott, pp. 57-59.

note this is to be brought up once more against the limits of Althusser's development. The inescapable fact is that it is after all a process of 'withering', and what it produces is shrivelled fruit. Althusser has not made a significant contribution to the task of construction which his evolution throws into such sharp relief. He appears to lack the capacity, in part at least because of the still powerful influence of the old epistemological problematic, to be creatively discursive about the truths he had struggled to attain. This is a serious deficiency for a philosopher, and one which goes a considerable way towards justifying Elliott's complaints of a decline in intellectual power. Nevertheless, if one attends to what was achieved, and against what odds, a positive evaluation is still appropriate. That the record taken as a whole shows a progressive development is a verdict which is qualified, not vitiated, by noting its outer boundaries and inner regions of petrification.

### The Crisis of Marxism

This should be a suitable point at which to review the prospect that Althusser's career may aid an appreciation of the current 'crisis of Marxism'. The matter is best approached by noting the way in which his own sense of the crisis came to inform his work. The suggestion of a turning away from Marx which is implicit in the comments on the 1859 'Preface' is, as Elliott shows, part of a larger pattern. It is one of increasing scepticism, pessimism and even despair over the theoretical legacy of historical materialism, attitudes which did not spare its founder.<sup>37</sup> What should be emphasized is that this is an intelligible, indeed almost inevitable, accompaniment of Althusser's development, of his deepening insight into the meaning of Marx's life-work and what it affirms and presupposes. The process is one of movement towards, and assimilation of, the thesis that Marxist theory is, in its self-conception, the consciousness of a movement of social reality. If the movement which was the ground of the theory begins to fail, it has to face not simply difficult times but the possibility of extinction. It is in danger of becoming an increasingly distorted and fading echo rather than a living voice. From this standpoint the crisis of Marxism is at root a crisis of Marxist practice, precipitated by the apparent loss or absence of the historical subject identified by Marx, the revolutionary proletariat of advanced capitalism. It is a crisis which threatens the very basis of the life of Marxist theory. This is the background against which the final phase of Althusser's career as a Marxist philosopher has to be situated.

The discussion may be given a more concrete turn by considering the question of Althusser's Maoism. The extent to which, after the mid-sixties, his political programme came to be centred on events in China is well documented by Elliott. It was there he looked for a practical correlate of his reconstruction of Marxist theory, 'a really living reference for socialism'. Elliott also shows how decisive the defeat of these hopes was for the Althusserian project as a whole. It was when 'the red star over China fell' that it became plunged into scepticism and

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275-76, 314-15, 320-21, 326-27.

crisis.<sup>38</sup> The merits of a political reading of Althusser now seem evident, in particular its ability to make unified sense of his life and thought. It must be said, however, that its potential is not entirely realized by Elliott, and that at times he falls somewhat below the level the topic requires. The use of trivializing language is symptomatic here, as in the reference to Althusser's '*chinoiserie*' on the class struggle in theory' and to his relationship with Maoism as one of 'flirtation' and of being 'seduced'.<sup>39</sup> More important is the fact that Elliott's substantive judgement on the relationship is unequivocally hostile; it was 'an influence for the worse', involving a turning aside from 'the far more original and fruitful course of 1960-65'.<sup>40</sup> Yet Althusser was, at the very least, setting an example to Western Marxist theorists of taking seriously the 'outlying' regions of the world system. In doing so he could be said to be counteracting in some measure one of the weakest features of the tradition, its Eurocentricity and preoccupation with things 'Western' in a provincial sense.

It may also be doubted whether Elliott has fully come to terms, intellectually or imaginatively, with the quality of his subject's response to the collapse of his political hopes. It is true that there was an element of despair in that response. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that what occasioned it was the loss of a reference for thought, this may be pardonable, and even, in a sense, admirable. It demonstrates at any rate how deeply Althusser had absorbed the crucial lesson of his late return to Marx, the conviction that for socialist theory to be dialectical it must move in harmony with the movement of reality. Despair may be seen as a kind of acknowledgement of the authority of this requirement in circumstances where it seems altogether impossible that it could be met. It may help to bring out the point if one notes what Althusser did not do by way of response. Most obviously, he did not use his last published writings to renege on socialism. Neither did he abandon the dialectic to decline into the essentially liberal stance of social critic, a stance which is always available whatever way reality seems to be moving. More specifically, he did not adopt the role, which might be thought a tempting one in the circumstances, of being a connoisseur of despair like Adorno, an intellectual whose opposition to the world and superiority to it are ever more confirmed as it moves towards apparent catastrophe. Althusser's response has by contrast an authentically tragic character. This is an aspect of his 'destiny' to which Elliott is fully alive, even if he has not used to the full his opportunities for capturing it. No one is as yet in a position to fix all the human lineaments of the tragedy, and Elliott recognizes this as 'another story, for a different teller'.<sup>41</sup> His work is a vital contribution to the foundations on which that teller will have to build. The present discussion has been an attempt to show that his contribution might have been even more satisfyingly comprehensive had he consistently trusted his own best insights and drawn out his political reading to the furthest limits of its strength.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 275-76, 287.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 194, 209, 270.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 209, 270.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

It is, of course, possible to be impressed by the tragic dignity of Althusser's response to events without having to respond in the same way. For Marxists the most fertile element in his last writings is still the challenge, delivered with his usual rhetorical force, to give the phrase 'the crisis of Marxism' a 'completely different sense from collapse and death', and thus to show 'how something vital and alive can be liberated by this crisis and in this crisis'.<sup>42</sup> Here too is a natural, indeed classic, response of dialectical thought to the moment of crisis, a vision of it as 'a time of birth and a transition to a new period'. The constitution of Marxist philosophy undoubtedly has a part to play in meeting this challenge. The main burden must, however, be borne by what was polemically contrasted to philosophy by the young Marx, 'the study of the real world'. This is more than ever necessary to comprehend the vast changes now taking place before our eyes, as both capitalism and 'actually existing socialism' reconstruct themselves in the hazardous enterprise of shifting their contradictions to a new plane. There is no need to assume that the task of revitalizing Marxist theory in this context will be easy or the result assured. But for post-Althusserian Marxists despair would be equally premature and, hence, faint-hearted and irrational. It is clear at least that the task cannot be carried through without engaging all available intellectual resources, and that the time for anathemas and boycotts in the socialist camp is past. To say this is to say that it cannot be carried through in the exclusive, Jansenist spirit of 'high Althusserianism'. Among its sources of inspiration and warnings a proper appreciation of Althusser's career as contemporary history must, nevertheless, have a significant place.

---

<sup>42</sup> Louis Althusser, 'The Crisis of Marxism', in *Power and Opposition in Post-revolutionary Societies*, London 1979, pp. 225, 229.



77 1990-1999

## AFTER TIANANMEN SQUARE

Ralph Miliband	Communism and Democracy
Li Yuan	Two Weeks in Beijing
Roberto Bobbio	The Upturned Utopia
Ellen Meiksins Wood	Marxism and Rational Choice
Terry Eagleton	The Fall of Oscar Wilde
Jan Taylor	The Hillsborough Disaster
Michael Löwy	Marx on the French Revolution

1		<i>Themes</i>
3	<i>Lu Yuan</i>	Beijing Diary
27	<i>Ralph Miliband</i>	Reflections on the Crisis of Communist Regimes
37	<i>Norberto Bobbio</i>	The Upturned Utopia
41	<i>Ellen Meiksins Wood</i>	Rational Choice Marxism: Is the Game Worth the Candle?
89	<i>Ian Taylor</i>	Hillsborough, 15 April 1989: Some Personal Contemplations
111	<i>Michael Löwy</i>	'The Poetry of the Past': Marx and the French Revolution
125	<i>Terry Eagleton</i>	Saint Oscar: A Foreword

*Editor*  
*Editorial Committee*

Robin Blackburn  
Tanq Ali, Perry Anderson, Patrick Camiller, Alexander Cockburn,  
Mike Davis, Peter Dewa, Diane Elson, Norman Geras,  
Quentin Hoare, Oliver MacDonald, Branka Magal,  
Ellen Meiksins Wood

*Editorial correspondence*  
*Subscription correspondence*  
*Business Manager*  
*Advertising Manager*  
*American Distributor*

New Left Review, 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR  
New Left Review, 120-126 Lavender Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HR  
Robin Gable  
Arthur Boyars  
B de Boer, 113 East Center Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA

NLR Prices	Individual subscription:	Institutional subscription:
<i>Inland</i>	£14	£28
<i>Overseas surface</i>	£18 or US\$28	£33 or US\$50
<i>Airspeed (USA &amp; Canada):</i>	£18 or US\$28 or Can\$38	£33 or US\$50
<i>Overseas airmail:</i>	£25 or US\$41 or Can\$52	£40 or US\$62
Back issues (non-subscribers)	<i>Inland:</i> £4	<i>Overseas:</i> £5 50/US\$7 50
Back issues (subscribers)	<i>Inland:</i> £2 95	<i>Overseas:</i> £3 70/US\$6 00

MICROFICHE SETS 1-172 (1960-1988). £350 or US\$600

INDEX 1-172 (1960-1988). *Club* £27 95 or US\$53 *Paperback* £12.95 or US\$25

New Left Review (ISSN 0028-6060) is published bi-monthly by New Left Review Ltd, 6 Meard St., London W1V 3HR, UK. Annual subscription price in the USA and Canada is US\$28 for individuals, US\$50 for institutions, including airspeed delivery. Second-class postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. USA POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to New Left Review, Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Printed in Great Britain.

The awakening of political life in the Soviet Union remains one of the few hopeful aspects of the current deep crisis of the Communist world, despite the fact that it has brought no improvement in the economic situation nor prevented an escalation of ugly incidents of national suppression and violence. This is because only further and bolder democratization, of the sort demanded this summer by many of the striking miners, has a chance of producing and sustaining the far-reaching transformation of social and economic institutions manifestly required in the lands of 'actually existing socialism'. Those who crushed the democracy movement in Beijing in June were not thereby solving or alleviating the acute social antagonisms bred by nearly a decade of rampant marketization and official corruption, but they were stifling the social learning process which can alone offer a hope of advance towards genuine democracy and socialism. This issue of the Review opens with an eye-witness report by a Chinese woman returning to Beijing from abroad during the last stages of the movement, as the month-long popular mobilization was first vilified and then brutally suppressed. Lu Yuan's diary vividly records the hopes and fears of that time, interweaving a day-by-day analysis of major political events with an evocative, often poignant account of their impact on family and social relationships. The characters who appear in these pages, their names shrunken to initials for their own safety, must now find answers to the question of what kind of political perspective remains viable after the crimes committed in the name of socialism on Tiananmen Square. This is also the question posed in different ways by Ralph Miliband and Norberto Bobbio. While Miliband is fundamentally concerned to bring democratic checks and safeguards into the heart of socialist renewal in the East, Bobbio lays much emphasis on the challenge which, in his view, the failure of communist utopias has laid at the door of Western liberal democracy.

The deep crisis of 'actually existing socialism' has not, fortunately, paralysed socialist theory or research. Marxist approaches are still fertile in the study of 'actually existing capitalism', but this Marxism is no longer seen as a homogeneous and univocal system leading to previously

established conclusions. The resulting diversity of socialist research now embraces Gramsci's legacy, Marxist historiography, the 'regulation school' studies of global economy, 'analytical Marxism', debates on 'market socialism', 'cultural materialism' and many others. But while the range and variety of the new schools are to be welcomed, it is just as necessary as it ever was to assess their validity and adequacy for the socialist project. In previous issues Alan Carling has commended the construction of a new paradigm, 'rational choice Marxism', by some analytical Marxists. Here Ellen Meiksins Wood offers a major examination of the claims made for the 'rational choice' approach, questions its explanatory power and argues that its formalism weakens its critique of capitalism at a time when a creative development of this critique is one of the principal tasks of the Left.

The recent series of disasters in Britain—on land, water and air—are eloquent testimony to the consequences of a corrosion of public space by the values of free-market capitalism, particularly sharp in a country with an ageing, often decrepit social infrastructure. For Ian Taylor, a leading sociologist of sport, this year's tragedy at Hillsborough football stadium, in which ninety-five people lost their lives, points also to the deadly effects of a class strategy of 'containing' the population at points of tension and effervescence. As this issue was going to press, the judicial enquiry into the disaster published an interim report severely critical of the actions of the Sheffield police, football officials and municipal authorities. But any serious drawing of lessons from the Hillsborough disaster, in the further stages of public debate, will have to address the broader questions raised in Taylor's article.

As the official celebrations of 1789 fade away for another fifty years, debates continue to rage among historians, philosophers and political theorists about the significance and legacy of that gigantic upheaval which began two centuries ago. Michael Löwy here traces the impact of the Revolution on the thinking of Karl Marx, and argues that it continues to have a relevance for the socialist movement in ways partly unforeseen by the founders of historical materialism.

Finally, we are pleased to reprint the foreword to Terry Eagleton's first play, 'Saint Oscar', which is currently touring both southern and northern Ireland.

Lu Yuan

## *Beijing Diary*

*Saturday, 27 May*

How astonishing it is that everything here seems to have returned to normal so soon! None of the awful things I imagined on that empty plane actually happened: questioning by the security police at customs, military control of the airport, no bus services to the city centre, and so on. No, so far so good. People even looked peaceful and happy, in fact, happier than what I remembered from four years ago when I left.

A bus took us straight to the centre, without having to pass through road blocks. Immediately there were posters to be seen everywhere, faded or half torn: 'Fight Martial Law!', 'Oppose Violence', 'Rise Up, Chinese!', 'Clean Away Corruption!', 'Punish the Profiteering of Privileged Officials!' While I was waiting for E. to meet me at the airline building, a group of taxi and tricycle drivers, the 'new rich' of the economic reform, came up to me. They were far more numerous than their potential passengers: 'No, thank you,' I said, 'I'm not that rich to spend my money like that.' The oldest among them, a man in his fifties, replied: 'Money is nothing. Can't you see it isn't the time to talk about money?' Before I had a chance to feel ashamed, other young drivers started asking me how I and my foreign friends had reacted to the student demonstrations. When I told them that we all saw the April-May events as a great democratic movement to the glory of us Chinese, they all grew excited.

The first words E. said as he met me were: 'You've missed the greatest scenes. You are too late.' I was reminded of S.S. who had provided me with my ticket and said: 'You Chinese are born in the right time and the right place. You'll regret it for life if you aren't able to take part in the revolution.'

It was 5.00 p.m. when we got home. Mother looked so much older. Lucky she no longer blamed me for this sudden decision to come back. But already E. was making a sign to me: 'Let's go out—if you don't feel too tired after your long journey.'

There were so many people on the streets—more and more as we approached Tiananmen Square. When we were stopped by the crowd

at Xinhuaamen, half a mile from the Square, I went to talk to students from the Beijing Aeronautical Engineering Institute and the University of Political Science and Law. They had been holding a sit-down there for a month, in shifts, facing a line of PLA guards who sat upright without any facial expression. 'We are betrayed,' the leader of the group cried, his young face oddly changed by grief and indignation. 'There hasn't been a single voice in this government to protect us.' Zhao Ziyang was the best, but even he had done no more than vote against martial law. [We now know how brave he was, and how difficult it had been for him to do that much.] As for Wan Li, the chairman of the People's Congress on whom we pinned so many hopes, he had just returned from the USA and unambiguously declared his support for Li Peng.

The Square has completely changed as a result of those tents and food tips and the terrible smell of urine. Of course, with thousands still living there, one couldn't have expected anything cleaner. When we had finally managed, with great difficulty, to pass through the student guards around the Monument to the People's Heroes, we found ourselves in the dirty, noisy, jumbled and bustling camp of the Square headquarters. This camp has made an amazing contribution to the whole democratic movement or, as I would prefer to call it, the civil liberation revolt. The student leaders were all hoarse and tired but kept on going. They know well what Chinese studying abroad have everywhere done to support them. The main problems they now face are: (i) they need cash as they have no bank account to receive overseas donations in cheques; (ii) they urgently need good-quality articles for their pamphlets and broadcasting; (iii) they are divided over whether to return to campus. Wang Dan (Beijing University) announced its withdrawal at a press conference nearby, but other leaders told us they were against it and that the decision was not based on majority agreement. 'The student occupation of the Square is now the last symbol,' they said. 'If we pull out, the whole movement will simply be over. We have to keep it up.'

Our conversation was interrupted by a young arts student who asked for money. 'Don't you see the crucial importance of building this statue?' The Headquarters secretary-general, a shy student from Jilin, was persuaded by the argument and signed a small, creased sheet of paper raising the approved sum from 500 to 1,000 yuan. What kind of statue will it be? It sounds like a last try—the mood is somehow lost and helpless.

When we left in the late evening, many more people were gathering. According to E., although the number of student occupiers and of citizens visiting the Square had fallen off sharply, a lot of Pekingese had kept their 'habit' of calling in at night 'in case they are needed to protect the students in any violent incident'. It is clear that the 'revolution' has already failed, that none of its demands has been realized. But we mustn't give up. I may have missed the most exhilarating stage of the movement, but still I hope it may not be too late.

Sunday, 28 May

D. brought me the main newspapers from the three-day period of press freedom. Alongside the reports from rebel journalists, so exciting and moving, large-size pictures showed the mass demonstrations of students, workers, intellectuals and all kinds of other professionals and ordinary people. However, only one brief commentary in *Ko Ji Daily* by Yu Guangyuan, 'An Important Page in the History of Our Republic', sharply contrasted with the notorious editorial in the *People's Daily* of 26 April. As one of the old guard himself and a leading Marxist theoretician, Yu's voice comes over loud and clear. Apart from the so-called 'soft-liners' like Zhao, there is clearly genuine political and intellectual backing within the upper circles of the Party for the student protesters.

Having an appointment with the student propaganda department, we went to the Square again and had no difficulty in entering with X.'s press card. What is most striking is not the primitive stencil-cutting and printing conditions but the low capacity of these young fighters to produce an analysis of the current situation, let alone a solid long-term programme. The 'Square University' is due to open in a week's time, but there is still neither a syllabus nor a list of lecturers. As I read the leaflets that had been produced, X. chatted with two boys from Wuhan and Xian who complained of the lack of democratic procedures and 'mountain-stronghold sectarianism' of some of the student leaders. Outside in the Square, at the daily 'Democratic Forum', a Nanjing graduate was attacking the CP tradition of concerning itself more with power than with communist ideals. However, his address was marked by violent emotion rather than serious analysis, and when the eager audience four times gave him an extension beyond his original three minutes, it occurred to me that we urgently needed to set up some serious discussion groups. In fact, not only Deng Xiaoping—who is seen as exemplifying the fashionable popular song 'Follow Your Nose' (without ideas in your head)—but our entire nation is to some extent lost, as we are supposed to be engaged in socialist reform yet lack any guiding theory.

The one-hour visit to Uncle M. was unpleasant. He was delighted to see me, but also warned me not to get involved in the protest. Though so thin and weak, he maintained a firm stand that the Communist Party would improve itself and that it was none of the students' business. 'The only result of such unrest is to destroy all we've achieved in the last ten years.' He also believed that since the naive students must have been incited by some reactionary foreign forces, it was necessary to tighten the post and telephone censorship. What could I say? Should I argue that the students' demands are all very basic, and that to refuse political change will simply lose the trust and support of the people? Or should I point out that a mass movement on such a scale cannot possibly be 'incited' by anybody? When an old battle companion of his came in and said that he'd heard the hunger strike was not on a voluntary basis, I couldn't bear it any longer and left. Just because their own children or grandchildren are not among the hunger-strikers, they become so callous and blind to the fact that it is

the purity, idealism, courage and sacrifice of these young people that have aroused the nation's conscience and mobilized people in Beijing at every level. I could never agree with you, Uncle M., and one day when you have recovered I'll try to persuade you. I wish I could, for you are one of the very few senior cadres who refuse to enjoy privileges and who should eventually understand why millions went onto the streets.

*Monday, 29 May*

We had our first meeting. No more moving stories (though I've already heard enough to break my prejudice that the older generations have lost their revolutionary ideals while the young have never developed any). No more impassioned speeches either—only serious discussion. We focused our attention on the following questions:

(1) The failure of the student movement is no doubt due, first of all, to the political pressures which—given the situation and consciousness of the workers, and particularly of the staff of state organizations—have effectively demobilized other social groups. The most successful (and sinister!) tactics of the authorities, above all of the Beijing Party Committee, have been to fuel panic purchasing and so create shortages of food and bottled gas; and to seize on occasional reactionary slogans (like the 'Overthrow the Communist Party!' shouted once by one single student but opposed by all others) in order to reinforce the inclination of our senior leaders.

(2) A counter-sentiment against the student movement is gradually mounting among conservative sections of the civilian population and even among those who basically sympathize with the students' demands. There are a number of reasons for this. First, there is fear of a return of disorder—although progress is usually brought about with or even through 'disorder', a term so often employed to describe mass participation. Second, there is no clear long-term goal, or even any clear idea about the next step. Many people took to the streets only to save the hunger-strikers, in an emotional rather than reasoned response. Thirdly, there is considerable tiredness and depression with the stalemate, and the authorities themselves realize that dilatory tactics are the simplest way of dampening popular enthusiasm when their own propaganda offensive is incapable of yielding results. Fourth, participation in the movement could have serious consequences in terms of income and job security, particularly for factory-workers. Moreover, the fact that, according to received theory, there can be no conflict between the working class and the party-state that rules in its name, has created a kind of political confusion that must have contributed to the passivity of a large part of the industrial working class. All these elements of popular concern mean that the absolute priority accorded to economic growth over political democracy could easily come back in force and regain support.

(3) Nevertheless, we had a great deal to say about the far-reaching significance of the movement, and I've been asked to write down our arguments soon. It seemed to us at least as important as the original



May 4th and possibly, though in a different way, as 1949. Just because the Chinese Revolution was such a bitter and protracted struggle, it could not really have been democratic. But on the other hand, the new spontaneous mass movement is not yet, at least, consciously revolutionary. The Party leadership, in reacting as if the participants were self-conscious revolutionaries and in immediately taking counter-revolutionary measures, has actually radicalized the movement, so that it may move on to pressing for change in the nature of the party-state and not just for the limiting of its social control.

(4) Although Zhao and his advisers have been active during the movement, most of them are not enamoured of democracy. Still, they do have some sincere and positive ideas on political reform, including concrete steps leading to the separation of state and party, army and party, enterprises and government, and even to a degree of press freedom, etc. It is incomprehensible that Deng could be so blind to these people's loyalty and ability. They are the best team for realizing Deng's own schema: socialism = economic reform (a market system) + ideological control (limited political reform based on a one-party dictatorship). The so-called 'new authoritarianism' or 'market Stalinism', theoretically justified by a group of middle-aged intellectuals and enjoying a certain popularity within Zhao's research institutes, is very close to Deng's own idea. Unless Deng has taken leave of his senses, he will soon realize his mistake and may reinstate Bao Tong (Zhao's secretary, the first to be arrested) and a number of others. These people, as we well know, are not radicals at all.

As it was by now late and we were going to attend the statue inauguration ceremony in the evening, we left to our next meeting the last two questions for discussion—the significance of the autonomous organizations of students, workers, intellectuals and residents, and the immediate and longer-term perspectives of the movement.

Today was expected to be a day of 'great demonstrations by Chinese all over the world', although there have been no reports of the response abroad. In Beijing only a few waves of smaller marches occurred. Some students worked on a crude scaffold to erect the statue in Tiananmen Square, and tens of thousands of people flocked in from all quarters to see the 'Goddess of Democracy'. But in the end the students' broadcast only announced her name and postponed the actual ceremony until tomorrow morning. Being among the crowds, I realized how clever the idea of the statue had been. Now people are returning to the Square to visit and protect this symbol of the already declining democratic movement.

*Tuesday, 30 May*

A beautiful morning. It was wonderful to meet T. in the Square. He is a philosopher but became an artist yesterday for the whole night in helping the students. Now, under brilliant sunshine, she stood up on her feet. Looking up at her, H. burst into tears. Clearly following the image of the American Statue of Liberty, she is nevertheless definitely Chinese—not only her face and hair but even more her expression and features. She looks young, brave, heroic and, inevitably, tragic.

The ceremony was magnificent. There were about 100,000 people, and everything went off in 'good order. The police had again simply disappeared. Small pieces performed by students from the Central Drama Institute won thunderous applause, and the sound from official loudspeakers was drowned out by cheering and singing. It was an unforgettable experience to hear the immortal *Internationale* sung in unison by a sea of people including oneself—something quite different from shouting *The East Is Red* in the same place during the Cultural Revolution. Two decades ago it was all about 'the great liberator, Chairman Mao'; today it is 'No saviour from on high delivers!'

We had a number of old friends for lunch and afternoon discussion. One of the things to come out of this was the idea of a questionnaire on martial law, the student actions, the role of the Beijing municipal and Party authorities, and the possible role of the National People's Congress in the current situation. We worked carefully under T. and B., who had a qualified training in sociology, to ensure the necessary scientific standards. We intend to send out 3,500 copies within a tested and representative city network, to collect responses within a week and have them analysed in the next few days, and to draw up a formal report as evidence for the possible emergency meeting of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress (more than thirty of whose members have jointly called for such a session).

Despite some hesitation, I still went to Aunt A.'s house. She had always loved me since I was a small child, and I often missed her. But this time she was so angry that she wouldn't even let me see her. Feeling hurt, I criticized myself for being so thoughtless, but I couldn't help it. It is precisely the pure and idealist communist education I received from her generation that has moulded me and placed me among the protesters. How can I explain the 'gap' between us? We all seek a better life for the Chinese people within a socialist framework, so why do we feel so distant from each other on political issues and have such different understandings of Marx's tenets? Of course their position means that they have to be very cautious and to consider much more complex matters than we do. But what really separates us is a smaller yet crucial point. For myself and my friends, we are *included* in 'the people' and so we fight for ourselves; whereas for old Communists like Aunt A., they work for the people *excluding* themselves. They are, in their own consciousness, the bearers of a 'historic mission' to bring things to other people. Every aspect of their attitude and way of thinking reflects this original idea. They constitute the best part of the upper Party stratum, however, and they are rapidly becoming smaller and smaller in number. It is all too sad to see the growth of a large group of 'false' Communists such as Li Peng. They do not connect with the people in either way; their only concern is to hunt for power in their own interests.

After the experiences with Uncle M. and Aunt A., I've decided not to see them any more. It will also be as well for them to avoid any suspicion of being connected with a 'foreign force', through someone who has just returned from abroad.

Our evening meeting continued yesterday's discussion on autonomous organization and the future of the movement. N., a Western socialist historian following events in China, had written a letter on 23 May which provided some very helpful analyses and laid great stress on the need for autonomous spheres of civil society to limit state control, to curb abuses of power, to institute an independent legal system, and to end the party's monopoly of power. This potential, however, has been far from fully recognized by ordinary participants in the movement, or even by members of the autonomous organizations themselves. China's lack of traditions of 'council communism', 'guild socialism' or 'workers' control' means that the current possibilities are much less than N. expects. Indeed, what worries me is that even members of one of our discussion groups, who are politically more experienced and mature than I am, couldn't really understand and accept the significance of voluntary organizations and a growth of pressure from civil society to match, resist and finally override state power. The task of creating a new tradition of democracy is extremely arduous, and U., a friend with whom I have had so many arguments, is right to emphasize basic political education and the consequences of the lack of educators available to teach.

N. thought that the victory of Party reformers, combined with popular enthusiasm for change drawing on the activity and success of the mass movement of spring 1989, could lead to the creation of more democratic (as well as more efficient) forms for socialism than had so far developed in the Soviet Union. The choice would then no longer be between Stalinist socialism and Asian neo-capitalism, even if the Party leadership kept direct political control and prevented for some time a democratization of state power. It seemed to us, however, that this possibility was already closed: the power struggle at the top was always an unreliable element. What seemed more likely was a situation of political stalemate, with all the dangers of wasted and dissipated enthusiasm, as happened with the Cultural Revolution.

In the middle of the night, B. brought us a joint ten-point statement ✓ from the autonomous unions of Tiananmen Square in which they announced their decision to withdraw. The problem is that while most local students in Peking have already returned to campus ✓ (though not to classes), thousands of students from other parts of the country insist on staying on. The student leaders themselves have ✓ divided into a more 'radical' and a more 'reasonable' group. B. also told us that three worker activists have just been arrested, and there has been a clash between the police and several hundred protesters in front of the Public Security Bureau. This is perhaps a signal of an all-out offensive, and the situation generally seems to have worsened. I greatly respect the workers who have initiated their autonomous organization and are therefore in the fore of the Chinese working class of the People's Republic. But is there any way to rescue these workers?

*Wednesday, 31 May*

In the morning T. rang me to say that our questionnaire project had fallen through because the only authority which could operate the

network (set up specially to keep the respondents unidentified) thought we must be mad to seek opinions on martial law in the area actually under martial law. I suggested finding some friends who would send the questionnaires off, but T. thought we should give up. After consulting some other friends, we all realized that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain real opinions under the present circumstances.

We visited Beida (Beijing University) and Quinghua University for a day. In Beida's famous 'triangle area' of wall posters, some students assembled for a protest march to the *Beijing Daily*, a rag whose reports and comments are often full of lies. Pretending to be an old man with a beard and walking-stick, one student held up two placards: 'Fight Press Freedom!' and 'Uphold Old Men's Politics!' Another student, baldheaded and dressed in a trim Zhong-Shan uniform (it was 36 degrees!), carried a poster in blood-red characters: 'I Love Martial Law—signed, Jiang Jieshi'. A large bag of *Beijing Daily* papers was carried on a flatbed tricycle to be burned in front of the paper's city-centre offices. Although no journalists, and very few others, will be prepared to defy the ban and join the students in demonstrating, there is no doubt that the parades still enjoy great popular sympathy, what Mao once described as 'the feeling of the people, of the party, of the party members'.

Public attitudes to the main media have been summarized by students as: *People's Daily*—'duping the people'; *Guang Ming Daily* (Light)—'pitch dark'; *Beijing Daily*—'nonsense talker'; State Television—'confounding black and white'. By contrast, smaller papers like *Ke Ji Daily* (Science and Technology), *Workers' Daily*, *Peasants' Daily*, *Economic Weekly* and *New Observation* have been widely praised, and the *World Economic Herald* in Shanghai has in many ways been a pioneer. The dismissal last month of its editor-in-chief triggered a large-scale protest movement by staff members on each of these newspapers, including the *Beijing Daily*. Journalists, by the nature of their job, should be among the most sensitive and advanced elements among the intelligentsia.

The posters in Beida are very impressive, better in quality than anything produced in the Square, except for the regular *News Herald* which is itself produced by the Beida-based Beijing Students Union. Teachers are clearly on the side of their students. The eight who called in the *People's Daily* for a resumption of classes (seven of them, significantly enough, from the Political Education Department) are now shamed and opposed not only by their students but also by their own colleagues.

The government's greatest error of judgment lies in its belief that raw youth has been manipulated by backstage political forces whose aim is to overthrow the CP and the socialist system. More than enough evidence shows that the students are innocent of having any such conspiratorial clique behind them. On the contrary, they have stated several times that they will not involve themselves in any kind of power struggle. The Party's present leadership is just incapable of

understanding the simple fact that no force on earth can 'overthrow' the CP and socialist system in China. If the Party does ever collapse, it will be because of its own mistakes or crimes: corruption, repression, abandonment of socialist and communist programmes. It is the students and their supporters who are trying hard to save China from such a tragedy, while those who attack the students and their 'backers' are acting in the most effective way to destroy the CP and socialism.

The last day of red May. A hot night. E.'s tape-recorder is singing *The Yang Guards*: 'Forward to welcome dawn . . .' I feel gloomy—the age of real revolutions, of clearly knowing who the enemies are and where the battle-lines are drawn, has gone.

*Thursday, 1 June*

International Children's Day. I took J. to Beihai Park. She's such a lovely little thing. On the day I arrived, she gave me a welcoming speech: 'Long live the people! Long live liberty and democracy! Long live university students! Long live . . .' She picked up these slogans from teachers at her nursery school and was excited to chant them with other children. They add in 'Long live mummy and daddy!', and so on. The park was beautiful as before, but with too many children queueing for the boats and new electrical games. The food at state-owned and private stalls was good and quite expensive, yet no one seemed short of money today. It was good to spend a happy morning with J. and to forget for a while what is going on outside.

At lunchtime we heard reports from friends about fresh troop movements. It is the eleventh day of 'martial law'. The big units are still held back in the suburbs, but thousands of soldiers have moved into the city. Our afternoon meeting focused on the options open to the government. The best of these—although we are certainly under no illusions—would be to accept whatever demands the People's Congress makes, including the recall of Li Peng and an apology for mistakes like the deployment of the army. The second option would be to withdraw the army and to issue a face-saving statement that, though the decision to introduce martial law had been correct, the situation was now returning to normal. In that case, a compromise might be possible whereby Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping keep their posts and Zhao Ziyang is reinstated, while the People's Congress holds its session and the State Council issues some progressive resolutions against top-level corruption. Such an outcome might not seem favourable to the democratic movement, none of whose explicit goals would yet have been achieved, but it could make it possible to develop the existing autonomous organizations and other forms of legal struggle, to achieve a series of reforms in the future, and above all to avoid bloodshed and civil war.

The third option would be to send the army into certain key points like the press, the major universities and the Academies of Science and Social Science, but without giving it overall control. It is doubtful whether such a course could work. Moreover, the government would be taking a risk that soldiers themselves, through close contact with

the most radical sections of Beijing society, would be won over to the side of the people.

4 The fourth and worst option (worst for both sides) would be to send in the troops at any price. But even for the toughest leaders, those who have lost all sense of being Communists, it would not be easy to court world-wide condemnation in this way and to forfeit the PLA's reputation as the 'people's army'.

There remains one fundamental question: what on earth is the real purpose of moving a mechanized force of 400,000 troops into Beijing? If the real target is not the demonstrators themselves but a tendency within the Party, then the second option, on which we pin such hopes, would simply not exist—unless a deal is struck between different interests, or, as we can only wish, the progressive side prevails among army commanders. (It is said that seven generals have submitted a letter to Deng arguing that the national defence force should not be used in internal affairs. It is also said that several hundred senior officers, on active service or retired, have signed a joint letter to the Central Committee against armed suppression of the movement. There are also a lot of unconfirmed reports about how some army units actually sympathize with the students and will refuse any order to open fire.)

The next move depends on Deng's will, assuming that he is able to keep control and is not too seriously ill. If he opts for repression, he might be able to get support from two sources: (a) the so-called 'old-men's faction' including key figures like Yang Shangkun (the State President) and Wang Zhen (the Vice-President) who have deep and influential roots in the army; and (b) the so-called 'princes' faction', which has inherited privileges and been involved in 'official selling'. These people regard themselves as natural 'inheritors of the revolutionary cause' and therefore the only group which should continue to rule our 'red country'. (W. knows that some of them have recently been going much more often to the 'old men', reporting how 'counter-revolutionary' the student movement is and advocating merciless repression.) This is not to deny the existence of genuinely revolutionary old guards or younger successors, but they do not and would not belong to either of these two factions.

The forces opposing Deng in such an event would, as it were, stem from both the positive and negative sides: a number of senior cadres would continue to argue that conflict between the people and the party/army should not be allowed; while some conservatives, especially officers who opposed the demobbing of a million soldiers in the army reforms, could take the opportunity to attack Deng. In any case, the possibility of bloodshed is small, because the price would be too high to pay. Deng wouldn't ruin the achievements of ten years of reform and thereby bring about his own downfall. And in the end, everyone who holds this regime dear would realize that once the army shoots people, the nature of the whole system changes and the question becomes indeed one of 'overthrow' rather than 'reform'. We should bear in mind, however, that Deng's personal inclination is

never to give in, and that he has gone too far already (or has been induced to go too far by conservative pressure, misinformation, and so on).

The evening was spent writing a leaflet article to counter defeatist sentiment. My keynote was perfectly expressed by a huge street poster: 'The end? No!'

*Friday, 2 June*

A new hunger strike, joined by four intellectuals, started at 2.00 p.m. Z. is among them. In a small tent under the monument, I saw him for the first time since he left us. He remains unchanged: calm, pale, but also sharp and spirited. He has always been such a gentle and cultivated person, and the atmosphere of irrationalism and violence has made him rise in revolt in a non-violent, self-sacrificing manner. As we shook hands I couldn't hold back my tears. For the sacrifices of three thousand young hunger strikers (many of whom will suffer serious consequences for the rest of their lives) have produced no change from a heartless government. And all those of us who were not taking part in the strike had no better ways of struggle. What a tragic irony that, for want of certain basic rights, the Monument to the People's Heroes is surrounded by the camps of a rebellious generation—forty years after the establishment of our Republic, for which so many laid down their lives.

The strike declaration is very modest. 'We have no enemy'; 'We must adopt the spirit of tolerance and the concept of cooperation'; 'We all share responsibility for the Chinese nation being left behind many others'. This declaration is the only document written during the whole protest movement that has some clear idea of democracy. The essence of democracy, it says, is 'to establish legitimate, autonomous and unofficial organizations gradually to form a non-official political force as a check to government decision-making'. At this point, there is no mention of the fundamental role that could potentially be played by the People's Congress. After the strike, I would like to talk to Z. about this.

Another key idea of the declaration is that of 'citizens' consciousness', involving 'a sense not just of justice and sympathy but also of rational participation, that is, of political responsibility'. 'In the politics of democratization every Chinese is first and foremost a citizen.' I'm not sure whether the authors are fully aware of the importance of this idea. Among other meanings, it is the best alternative to the ill-defined concept of 'patriotism'. When the students claim that their movement is 'patriotic', what they are really trying to express is precisely the sense of responsibility. Not only is the slogan of 'patriotism' theoretically in opposition to socialist internationalism; it is also often employed by those political educators who regard the state, the party and the ruling group of society as a holy trinity. H. suggested to me many times that Chinese intellectuals were too concerned with their country and hence with politics, and that this was a disadvantage rather than an advantage for our nation. We must find time to talk it

over and clarify our ideas about the contradiction between 'citizens' consciousness' and the need for intellectuals to be independent of the structure of bureaucratic power and ideology. Both H. and Z., however, are gradualists who reject the notion of 'enemy'. I am sceptical. Are those who exploit and repress the people, by a Marxist definition, our enemies?

In the evening, a police car ran onto the pavement at Muxudi and killed three people and injured one. When we got there, a student was standing on the overturned car and reporting the course of the incident, with bloodstains scattered around. It seemed to be a traffic accident, but the angry crowd believed that it was a conscious provocation. A big demonstration has been called for tomorrow. Tension is mounting.

L. called from the USA. His period of study at Princeton is due to end in June. Tickets which had been booked for his family to return home have just been cancelled by friends. China so much needs qualified intellectuals, but those who control the government are striking a heavy blow against them and preventing many of them from coming back. Such losses may seriously affect China's work of construction for many years to come.

*Saturday, 3 June*

People in Peking were woken during the night by the sound of marching troops. Most of them were raw recruits without weapons—truck-loads of military equipment have been moved in separately. A group of us went to each of the main points where the soldiers were blocked by local residents in the early morning.

At Xidan-Liubukou thousands of people completely surrounded some buses and a jeep (the command post). The soldiers were not in uniform, and the people were enraged at the secret moves in such contrast with the slogans on display: 'Learn from the people of the Capital! Salute the people of the Capital!' The soldiers seemed tired, depressed, not reacting to the people who kept reasoning, shouting and singing. There was no violence. Later someone who looked like a commanding officer and his young bodyguard climbed out of the jeep onto the top of their cart. The younger of the two, at his commander's request, started to address the crowd through a megaphone: 'Please would everybody believe us...!' His voice was simply swamped. Nearby many young people sat on a two-bus barricade singing *Down with Big Powers*, only they changed the words to: 'Down with Li Peng! Fight for democracy! People should be the master, go forward!' After repeating this several times, they took up a song created for the student movement during the war of liberation: 'Solidarity is strength, stronger than steel! Fire at the fascists! Abolish all undemocratic systems! New China lies ahead, shining with boundless radiance!'

In the afternoon, huge numbers of people watched or kept pace along the pavements of Changan Avenue as a student march proceeded towards Tiananmen Square. Some students stopped for a short rally in front of the China TV building.



At midday at Xinhuaamen the police had clashed with the crowd as it dashed in from Zhongnanhai to recover the truck with weapons and ammunition that had been put on display. (In fact, the students were persuading people not to take weapons and were actually trying to return them to the government.) Teargas grenades were used for the first time, and several people were injured. S. was there and told me afterwards that she had never 'cried' like that before.

We went to the Square later in the day and found that some troops had already reached there. At the western side of the Great Hall of the People, history was following a very unusual course. Some four thousand PLA men sat there in rows, their helmets shining under the fierce sun. Ten times more civilians surrounded them, highly disciplined though not drawn up in lines. In the two-metre-wide gap a number of students were acting as stewards to keep order. One of them had already shouted himself hoarse with repeated calls for calm and restraint: 'Please don't throw things at the soldiers, we beg you! They are innocent. The PLA is the people's own army...' Another student then took the lead in shouting four-character rhyming slogans, which were all very moving and well selected. The strains of the *Internationale* soon grew into a great chorus: 'Arise, ye prisoners of want!...' It was followed by the National Anthem (written during the anti-Japanese war), so solemn and stirring:

Arise, we who refuse to be slaves!  
To build a new great wall with our bodies!  
It's the most dangerous hour of the Chinese nation,  
all are forced to resist at last!  
Arise, arise!  
We all have one single mind,  
braving the enemy's gunfire!  
Advance!

The soldiers made no response, but I felt they were singing with us in their hearts and would never ever open fire on the people, who cannot be 'counter-revolutionary' under any circumstances.

By the evening bad news had spread about a number of ordinary citizens and soldiers who had been injured at major intersections. How serious the conflicts are is still unknown. One can only hope that the strengths of socialism, of the best traditions of the Chinese Communist Party, however damaged, will prevail at this late hour. China, my home country, I wish you could go through this test!

*Sunday, 4 June*

So many things have changed or simply been ruined overnight. Yesterday, at 11.30 p.m., Y. told me on the phone that shooting had started in the area of the Military Museum on Western Changan Avenue. I denied it in my conscious mind but believed it by instinct. In fact, I could hear shots in the distance yet still wished they were firecrackers or anything but live bullets. I went out at about midnight, with very little thought but to be among those whose principle was non-violence and who were now facing the army.

Many people were out listening to the shooting: the air smelt of gun-powder. At Huguosi I saw about 400 PLA men marching in the opposite direction, led by students with red armbands. One of these was shouting: 'Soldiers, double time!' The young soldiers obeyed and were cheered by local residents. This unit was evidently on its way to desert.

When I reached Xidan crossroads, the buses we had seen during the day were raging with flames. I abandoned my bicycle and joined the crowd that was still trying to stop the troops' advance. Thick smoke and teargas were bringing tears to everyone's eyes. I met F. who told me how the first tanks had crushed the barricades, knocking people off the tops of buses that soon caught fire. By now the way was clear for trucks to move east one by one, the slowness of their advance suggesting that there must be battles somewhere ahead. The whole city of Peking seemed in a state of outrage and extreme agitation. On the side-streets off Changan Avenue, thousands of us rhythmically shouted in the intervals between gunfire: 'You animals!', 'Li Peng—fascist!' and 'Go on strike!' But the troops shot back, killing those who were not swift enough to squat down or move away or who simply took no heed of bullets. People were constantly falling to the ground and being taken to a nearby hospital, but the mood of indignation completely overwhelmed any feelings of fear.

I kept thinking of how to reach Tiananmen Square, and in the end I separated from F. and set off along Changan Avenue in a way that allowed me to observe troop movements. It was about 2.00 p.m. While other people kept to the sheltered inside of the pavement, I walked almost alone on the outside, with the army trucks about twenty metres away. If they would really shoot someone who was just walking by, without even a piece of brick in their hand, I preferred to die there and then—there would be nothing left to say, to hope or live for. As I looked at the fully armed and helmeted soldiers, I suddenly felt sorry for them. Had these duped youths ever thought that they might one day enter the heart of their motherland like this? The great city was burning with hatred, full of 'rioters' mobilized everywhere against them.

At Liubukou bloodstains could be seen here and there. I was told that the mass of people had blocked the army for a short time and were then crushed by tanks and armoured cars travelling at full speed. Now only the last few trucks were surrounded by a group of people smaller in number than the troops passing through. Yet people were desperately shouting: 'Lay down your arms, lay down your arms!' Every few seconds a soldier fired a clip of ammunition into the air. The people totally ignored him, except to lower their heads when he shot. Later, some people climbed aboard a truck and moved to disarm the soldiers. But suddenly about twenty-five soldiers from the next truck jumped down and opened fire. It all happened in a second. People fled in all directions. All I could do was hide behind a rather thin tree at the side of the Avenue. The fusillade of more than twenty guns continued for some eight minutes, some of the bullets splashing blue light on the ground. I saw seven people being taken to hospital on tricycles

or whatever else was at hand. One man was seriously wounded in the abdomen, and several other hands plus his own could not stem the heavy bleeding. Some people rushed towards the trucks to save someone who had just fallen there, but the soldiers, thank heaven, didn't shoot at them. A young man darted towards me from the relative safety of the inner pavement. 'I'm here with you', he said, and told me not to be scared. Once it was clear that no one would oppose them, the soldiers helped those who had been besieged into their own truck and drove away at full speed, leaving behind the one with a broken tyre. It was now about 3.30 a.m. I learned later that the soldiers on that truck (the third one from the end) lost their company commander at Muxudi, where he was believed to have killed three civilians, including a child, and was beaten to death by the angry crowd.

I continued on my way east to Tiananmen, but when I reached a point about fifty metres from Xinhuamen, a policeman pointed his gun at me and shouted: 'Go back! Get away!' I tried to ignore his warning, but as soon as I took two steps forward his fellow-policemen became tense and approached us with weapons. The soldiers on the main road also quickly reformed their lines, and a few people who had been following me turned back. I remained there sitting on a steel fence. The policemen didn't force me to leave and returned to their former position.

I sat there, half lost in thought. It seemed the dead of night. No voices came from the direction of the nearby Square, but I'm no longer sure whether it really was quiet or whether I just couldn't hear anything. I felt so negligible and useless. All of us were simply useless. We had a just cause, they had a 'family army'; we could shout, they could shoot; we wanted an improvement in our leadership, they took lives from their enemy; we asked for reform, they replied with war. A book I had read not long before—*Salute the Songs of Our Army*—appeared for a moment in my mind's eye. It recorded, in poetic language, the army's glorious career from the Nanchang Uprising of 1927 to the victory of 1949, as well as its contribution of nearly forty years to the defence and construction of the People's Republic. (It didn't mention, however, the dark side of the army: the privileges, corruption and factional mentality; the poisoning with nationalism and chauvinism that was at its worst during the Sino-Vietnamese conflicts.) I remembered only too well how much I had wanted to join it when I was young, and I thought of all my elders, relatives and friends who had served in it. Having gone through countless difficulties, this army now found its honour destroyed overnight.

It seemed that while political power was being surrendered to the military, military action in turn served to strengthen political power. In fact, political and military power had always been combined and controlled in the hands of one person, from the era of Mao ('Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun') to that of Deng. Deng's role in recent events remains unclear, but this doesn't affect the fundamental reality of Chinese politics. The personal careers of people like them not only reflect but also shape the course of the party-army regime in China: from idealist-communist to privileged socialist to

pragmatist reformist to morbidly fascist. Today's bloody incidents are certainly not their first crime, but they must be the gravest that we have had to face. And I really don't know how we will face it.

I don't know exactly how long I sat there, but I was feeling sick and shaken when the day finally broke. From now on everything would be different.

On my way home I couldn't believe my eyes. The streets were occupied with roadblocks and hundreds of burned-out vehicles. Beijing, an ancient city of great cultural value, a city even the Kuomintang preferred to hand over in 1949 rather than see damaged, had become the ugly remains of a battleground. A contingent of some two hundred flag-bearing students had just withdrawn in loose formation from the Square. Many of them, girls and boys, were weeping. The way in which they had been hurried out of the Square meant that they could provide little or no information about those still there. The leader of a later group couldn't find any words at all and just sobbed loudly when people gathered round and asked about the situation.

E. and S. were waiting at home where everybody had been worried about me the whole night. We made and received phone calls to check that various friends were safe. But it was often very difficult to get through, and we could get no news of some of those we were most concerned about. Luckily F. was safe. He had been stopped at the Zhengyi Road intersection, and although he saw flames and heard shots and human cries, he had been unable to see exactly what was happening in the Square.

D. tried the whole morning to find some way into the Square, but found that it was tightly guarded by an outer defence line. At various points where he was turned away, however, he managed to glimpse the countless tanks, armoured vehicles and foot-soldiers occupying the vast area of the Square. The Statue of Democracy has been murdered and carted away. The people's square has become a military camp. (It is said that 40,000 troops are stationed just in the Great Hall of the People.) Early today the state television announced that martial-law troops had 'put down the counter-revolutionary rebellion'. Fully armed soldiers are patrolling the main streets of central Beijing. No public transport. No postal service. No schools open. Very few shops. People are staying away from offices. The city is dead.

Yet in spite of strict precautions and an atmosphere of growing terror, a weak but clear voice unexpectedly appeared on CCTV's English-language news programme for fifteen seconds: 'Please would all of us remember the dark day today, June the 4th, when many people, including a few of my own colleagues, were killed.' And the *People's Daily* actually published a special issue reporting that mechanized troops had broken through all barriers and cleared Tiananmen Square. Although there has so far been no way of obtaining figures, we must let all parts of the country know that the 'people's army' did shoot the people in the capital.

*Monday, 5 June*

Q. had a narrow escape in the Square that night. He showed me two bullet-holes in the fold of his trouser leg. Actually he had not been involved himself. 'I'm a historian,' he said; 'I just wanted to see and record what really happened.' He saw how the tanks and APCs came in, and how the workers organized an emergency picket to fight them. The students did their utmost to avoid violent confrontation, dissuading workers from firing back and rescuing the wounded soldiers. Prepared to die themselves if necessary, they declared that 'sacrifice is the highest principle of non-violence'. The workers, however, went their own way, seizing weapons and calling for 'an armed revolution against counter-revolution'. They hauled bricks and reinforcing bars from a nearby building-site and constructed temporary defence works with amazing speed as soon as the Square headquarters received reports of the army's assault. A worker picket set a lorry on fire and, before anyone realized what was going on, drove it through a hail of machine-gun bullets to ignite the first tank that had arrived under Tiananmen rostrum. Fierce battles ensued in the northern part of the Square, on Changan Avenue and on two side-streets leading off the Square. A young girl was shot in the chest and died helplessly in Q.'s arms. He couldn't remain a spectator any longer and, picking up a megaphone from the ground, shouted 'Fascists!' at the soldiers. He was followed by a mass of people, whose voices resounded throughout the square. A commander responded with a volley of gunfire, but fortunately there was some obstacle which saved Q. from being shot. Considering the need to bring out valuable tapes and photographs for the historical record, he left the square at 3.30 a.m.

We went to see another friend, R., who had just spent a day in hospital after the group of peaceful sit-down students he was in was attacked by policemen using sticks, electric prods and, most seriously, what he believed to be chemical gas. While forty others fainted, he felt the gas burning inside his body yet never lost consciousness. He had not been able to stay long enough in hospital for proper treatment, because it was overflowing with wounded people and suffered from a lack of blood reserves and adequate nursing help. One of R.'s relatives, who had just been passing when an artery in his right leg was damaged by gunshot, had been hurriedly treated as an out-patient and sent home. I rang G., a doctor friend working in the Capital Hospital, and asked if he could help find a bed for R.'s relative. But he was sorry to tell us that in his hospital, not only blood but food and medicine were running short. Some of the sick and wounded would have to be moved to the Sino-Japanese Friendship Hospital, which was located outside the battle zone and was therefore not badly affected by the sudden overload.

We wear black mourning bands for the dead and hope that people throughout the city will follow us in this small expression of our feelings. However, very few people on the streets do the same, and the memorial wall-posters and wreaths on street corners and at the university gates all disappeared this afternoon. A passer-by quietly advised us to remove our armbands, pointing to the low-flying helicopters and

soldiers on duty. I recalled with anguish the story of a little girl who was shot under the white terror in 1927 just for wearing a red scarf.

At mother's request, E. and I. queued at the grain shop and grocery for four hours in order to store some food against the worst. (There was no price change in the state-run stores, but the free markets have made a big rise today.) Many households are doing the same, and some began to lay in water each morning as soon as martial law was decreed in May. The queues often turned into free forums, where ordinary residents expressed great sympathy with the students and disgust at the way in which the government was trampling on 'the elite of a generation' (to quote a common expression). One middle-aged man said that whenever he watched TV he couldn't help wanting to smash the set. 'The news these days are all lies', he said. Another woman, apparently a housewife, concluded: 'This verdict will be reversed sooner or later: the dead "counter-revolutionary thugs" will become revolutionary martyrs, while those who gave the order to open fire will be put on trial for murder.' We told a visitor, a retired teacher, about the brave wall-posters produced by students and 'cadres of state organs' about the government killings and the general situation. We were greatly discouraged by his pessimistic response: 'Popular feelings in China often switch quickly to the side of the authorities and play little role in any dissident culture or politics.' But I can't believe that the people of Peking will forget what they were demanding and begin to tolerate this shameless government.

S. came from the airport where she had just seen off the last group of German tourists who arrived on 3 June. They were terrified and had given up their entire holiday plan. S. said that she, like everyone else in her travel company, had lost her job, and that the tourist industry had completely collapsed. Economic pressure may do more than political crisis to shake the ruling group, damaging the whole country in the process. The *Voice of America* has confirmed that some Western countries and the UN will be taking economic sanctions against China. But I fear this will harm the Chinese people more than the government, simply because any blow to the newly reformed (though in many respects unsuccessful) national economy will have long-term effects, while the government must prove to be short-lived after the events of 4 June. The crime of the present leadership is not only to have cost many young lives (including those soldiers who died in an 'anti-people offensive'), but also to have sacrificed the essential interests of the nation for something so small as 'saving face'. As far as these men are concerned, so little different from previous ruling classes, the people have no right to ask for any concessions from their supposed 'servants'; if they claim their rights, they become 'enemies of socialism'.

There were two long-distance calls tonight. Some friends from Hong Kong told me of the demonstrations of millions yesterday and today. 'We weep for the people on the mainland and for the first time really feel that we are not British subjects but Chinese, pure and unchangeable Chinese.' The second call, from Shanghai, informed me of the death this morning of a very good friend from my parents' generation.

How much I regret not having arranged to visit him in time! He had suffered from cancer for two years, but since April the unfolding student movement for democracy had seemed to revitalize his dying body. The harsh reality of the war between government and people finally took his life, the life of a faithful Communist, a true intellectual and an old fighter in the revolutionary ranks. In Shanghai, a hundred thousand industrial workers have been organized by the city authorities into a powerful force, playing the role that the PLA plays in Peking but without weapons. I wonder what these workers really think of events in Peking and of the student movement in Shanghai itself. The class consciousness of workers is a big question that we failed to answer for a long time.

The whole day I couldn't forget that worker who drove a blazing lorry into a tank. I'll take a bunch of flowers to his memorial one day in the future. Later generations of the Chinese working class will remember him, an ordinary, unknown worker who 'gave his life for a new era' (in the words of Han Dongfang, another member of the Workers' Autonomous Union who took this common pledge and may have redeemed it too).

*Tuesday, 6 June*

We learned from an informant that the Peking Red Cross has reported 2,600 dead and nearly 10,000 injured among civilians. The Headquarters of the General Staff have reported 27 dead and 2,000 injured from the army. The state TV, however, relayed a joint municipal and army news conference which claimed an overall total of 300 dead and 5,000 injured soldiers. The official media have not even shrunk from using the phrases of the counter-revolutionary terror of the twenties and thirties, such as 'Kill on the spot without asking questions.' I really suspect that Taiwan's anti-communist spies have sneaked into our TV station.

C. came back late from visiting the major hospitals which took in the wounded during the street battles. He was extremely depressed at the fact that bodies were still not being identified and claimed by relatives. He could get no reliable casualty figures, and the total is still increasing from the sporadic fighting today. Small bands of brave citizens have armed themselves with captured weapons and formed a 'city guerrilla' that is being ruthlessly hunted down and killed. They have absolutely no chance of escaping elimination, but for the time being the occupying forces are made very jumpy by their surprise attacks.

It is now clear that most of the dead are not students. To our great relief Z. is alive in the coastal region, though he was beaten by rods when the soldiers forced them out of the Square in the early morning of the 4th. He and three other intellectuals on hunger strike were the last group to leave. They negotiated with the army commanders, secured an agreement on the students' peaceful withdrawal, and helped persuade and organize their departure. About two thousand students had been sitting in the area of the Monument regardless of

the battles around. All of them, according to Z., including some injured by beating or trampling, finally left the square safely by the south-east corner—unless a few had by any chance stayed inside the tents when, as we know from video film, they were run over by tanks. Having witnessed the whole clearance operation, Z. confirmed that 'the army didn't shoot' at the students in that part of the square.

We have also heard that all servicemen in Peking other than the troops specially brought in for repression were ordered to keep out of the action. Today troops have been deployed in a wide area, occupying most of the high buildings on Changan Avenue and many assembly halls including the Beijing Gymnasium. Groups of tanks are stationed at each bridge intersection of the two major ring roads within the city limits. A lot of wreckage remains on the streets. So far three friends have personally witnessed soldiers burning vehicles.

We decided to write to Marshals Nie and Xu, lodging a complaint against the now notorious 27th Army on the basis of what we saw along Changan Avenue. (This army is said to come from the Vietnamese border area, and I'm not at all surprised that it was chosen for the job.) We could at least bring the charge of violating military discipline. For if the order was to occupy Tiananmen Square and to crush any obstacles in the way, the soldiers evidently broke it by firing indiscriminately to their sides and rear when the path ahead was clear. Before we finished our letter, however, Y. brought news that the two marshals and all top-ranking generals had sided with Deng, who made the decision to attack, and with Yang, who had the task of carrying it out. It was therefore pointless to write. As Y. put it: 'For these veterans who lived through heaps of bodies, killing is nothing. Once they accept a war, they'll never count the cost.'

The radio has been repeatedly broadcasting the Central Committee/State Council 'letter to the whole party and the whole nation', with lies and nonsense in every sentence. The group of us just sat there silently: it was so contrary to our expectations that nothing had happened following the brutal offensive, no split in the party or army, no organized strikes, let alone a general strike. Instead, there has been a wave of public or secret arrests, and many people have either gone into hiding or prepared to flee Beijing. The entire state apparatus, with its deep roots in society, has remained intact, as have the party structure and the political system. All these are functioning with great efficiency to save a tottering leadership from the most severe crisis of the last forty years.

Some CP members of fifty or more years standing have been talking of resignation, but none goes ahead. Nor do we ever go beyond discussing. Why is this? Invisible shackles bind the two communist generations with the slim hope of a future inner-party reform. A few people left the Party at the height of the student movement, and some local branches called on the Central Committee to expel the Li Peng clique. But since the 4th of June, there have been few actions of either kind. This may have something to do with the shock and confusion about one's political identity: either Deng's crime is not yet enough, or



people are not yet conscious enough to do what Western CP members did in their thousands in 1956.

It's very late. Shots in the distance are breaking the still of the night. Many thoughts well up inside me, making me profoundly sad. I've never felt so much the importance of peace and safety, of basic human life, of love, beauty and happiness. One more friend has disappeared. Still no news about several others. Q. who, unlike most of us, never had any interest in experiencing life abroad, now tells me that he wants to leave the country at all costs, if only so that his little daughter 'won't grow up in an atmosphere of terror'.

*Wednesday, 7 June*

In the morning P. and I went to see whether the Academy of Social Sciences (about two miles from Tiananmen Square) has been taken over by the army. In fact the whole building was empty: no research work, no military control. We went up to the fifteenth floor and watched some 200 tanks, other vehicles and foot-soldiers moving from west to east; the men were chanting 'Safeguard the people in the capital!' Suddenly there was a sound of gunfire and white smoke rose from the windows above the sixth floor of a building opposite. The troops immediately turned on the building, a diplomatic compound, and raked it with machine-gun fire for about fifteen minutes.

After the incident was over, P. tried to buy a ticket at the railway station to Guangzhou, where he has relatives to stay with. The station and its ticket offices were full of fleeing students. (Army helicopters have found the campus to be empty, and the authorities have abandoned their plan of moving troops in.) Leaving P. in a long, straggly queue, I went to see V., a man of 88 years who, though not a member, is a long-standing supporter of the Party. To my surprise, he had kept his consistent optimism after the 4th of June, believing that China had achieved enormous progress and that no one could push her back under any circumstances. He gave me his new creation, a poem called 'Still the people making history'. While touched by his unflagging spirit, I reflected that this time at least no one other than Deng was making history.

How naive we were to place such hope in the present National People's Congress! Its Standing Committee basically consists of two groups of people: one is drawn from the eight so-called 'democratic' parties within the CP-led united front, often more 'communist' than their partners or even enjoying dual membership; the other consists of CP officials retired from posts of real power who, with some honourable exceptions, regard their position as a token for past contributions. Ordinary deputies to the Congress are even less trustworthy: they are supposed to be the 'best citizens' (model workers, PLA heroes, and so on) and they are always ready to vote for rather than against. (Some did vote against the new bankruptcy law in 1987, however.) If we really want a People's Congress as the 'supreme power' in the country, the first step must be to reform the whole electoral system, and the second to amend the constitution so that control

of the military is in the hands of the Congress. The people's fate would not then hang on such imponderables as one person's act of will.

A hot night again. Thinking of today's meeting with V., I realize we need to sober up. I didn't answer well his question about the confrontation between the PLA and the people, which should not be seen simply as a crackdown by a reactionary army against unarmed protesters, as has often happened before in history. First, the people were able to talk to the soldiers and to block them in the outskirts for two weeks. Secondly, although there were a number of cruel killings, many bullets were fired into the air (otherwise, the shooting in Liubukou, for example, could have killed and injured not seven but several hundreds). Thirdly, the army itself sustained heavy injuries and losses of equipment—a sign of the people's heroism but also of the army's relative tolerance. Finally, fraternization has continued even after the bloody incidents, based on a distinction between the army units which carried out that mission and other units. These are facts, and only with a calm mind can we seriously analyse them and set them in the historical context of the Communist Party, the army and the state of socialism in China.

The war in Beijing has taught us very grim and painful lessons. But it can by no means justify the anti-communism of circles in the West, of those who are anyway hostile to the Chinese Revolution or who take democracy to be absolutely incompatible with socialism. Nothing is more tragic in the history of socialism than those cases where the people have been driven into the international front of reactionary forces by the crimes of certain Communist governments. We mustn't allow this to happen to us.

*Thursday, 8 June*

The authorities have announced that the autonomous unions of students and workers are illegal, and issued a circular naming 21 wanted students. Members of the Union of the Intelligentsia and the Union of the Capital's Citizens have been ordered to surrender themselves to the police. For the first time the government has placed on an equal footing the students and the 'thugs' or 'social dregs' (some of whom doubtless mingled with other protesters, as in all mass movements). Intellectuals who 'have long been engaged in bourgeois liberalization' are now accused not only of creating 'turmoil' but also of being the force behind the 'counter-revolutionary riot'.

The students made a great achievement in establishing their own organization. If they keep their courage, while developing ideas towards a political programme, they may become the backbone of a future people's movement for radical change. The ideas expressed during the protest are rather confused and fragmentary and combine a number of elements: (a) a strong nationalism or feeling of 'national humiliation' for China's economic backwardness and weak presence in world politics; (b) an idealized image of Western democracy, such that the US political system seemed to many young students to be perfect; and (c) a half-damaged ideal of socialism in which Gorbachev's

political reform is the main source of inspiration. These socialist ideals are most clearly expressed in a song *Seeking the Ideal of the People's Republic* composed by students at the Central Conservatory of Music in May, a song cherishing the genuinely socialist, democratic and modernized country of the future. As to the strategy of non-violent resistance, this may stem from the Indian experience: some students had read Nehru's biography and seen the British-made film *Gandhi*. But the more direct background must be a basic acceptance of the existing regime, a common knowledge that the power they resisted was reformable. How shameful the government is to demonstrate that the students were wrong!

O.'s younger brother, a brilliant student in physics, is also on the list. His family has had no idea of his whereabouts since the 3rd of June. 'If he's safe and finally returns to us, I'll go on with my career as a painter,' O. declared. 'But if he's been killed or purged, I shall "renounce the brush for the sword", taking up politics as my new profession.' He is a very fine and able person and I think I can give him my vote one day.

*Friday, 9 June*

The atmosphere is becoming tenser. Although transport is still at a standstill, people are starting to be summoned to party or state units to make known where they stand. Many of them will be required to say some things against their conscience, as they have done to a greater or lesser extent in relation to previous political movements. *New Observation* and the *Economic Weekly* have been forced to stop publication. Almost all the papers, except the *Liberation Army Daily*, have been criticized for not taking a firm pro-government stand during the 'riot', and I assume that some editors are about to lose their jobs. There is a strict ban on wall posters and leaflets, and anyone who dares to keep producing, posting or distributing them will be 'punished on the spot'. The worst days of the 'Gang of Four', when people feared informers and talked insincerely, are returning.

Most serious of all is the economic pressure stemming from the domestic predicament and the collapse of foreign trade and aid relations. Deng appeared on television today, receiving martial law commanders, praising the army and declaring that the reform and open-door policies will continue. But how? Even before the recent events, China had reached a point where it was necessary to examine the successes and failures of the past ten years, to review our strategies and policies, and to look for new possibilities. The student movement and its tragic end involved an explosion of accumulated crises. There were mounting contradictions between a 'capitalist base' and a 'socialist superstructure' (to simplify the problem and to use an unfashionable metaphor); between the rising class of a bureaucratic-comprador bourgeoisie ('official or privileged resellers') and ordinary people as well as the small 'new rich' who have had little chance to grow into a strong middle class; between liberalization within cultural, academic and educational institutions and the system of strict control over the media, political organs and ideological formation.

The post-1978 reform, because of its crippling limitation to the economy, has actually led China towards a kind of bureaucratic capitalism. This may help to raise general living standards, but the fundamental interests of the working people, their right to master their own destiny and the ways in which they fight to realize it, have continued to be denied. (Just a sudden thought: While being passive or even resisting certain reforms in the economic domain, workers should welcome practical moves towards political change, such as those which strengthen the power and position of trade unions. I was wrong to view the Chinese working class as a conservative force during the period of reform; they were somehow conservative because things were somehow reactionary.)

It was so bitter to have that argument with K., a close friend since we were very young whom I hadn't seen for years. 'If I had a gun in my hands,' she said, 'I would fire at those thugs who so brutally killed our PLA men.' But who were the criminals who made things end as they did? As I see it, the leadership twice passed up the opportunity to calm the situation instead of letting it intensify till the final disaster. (On 20 May, the day when martial law was declared, the seven-day hunger strike was already over and the students were preparing for 'dialogue' with the government. Again, by the end of May, the movement was drawing to an end before the troops were sent in.) Our conversation hurt both of us so much that we couldn't bear it any longer and soon said goodbye with a feeling that our twenty-year friendship had been left in ruins. I told T. what had happened. His comment was that K.'s position stemmed from her formation in the time of 'learning from Lei Feng' (a model soldier of the 1960s) and her own 'exemplary' development which was based on unshakable faith in the moral validity of the party. Maybe so. But we all grew up in a way similar to K.'s, and nothing ever really divided us during the difficult years of our youth. What is more terrible is that K.'s attitude could again be an example for others and confuse the issues of principle.

I want to cry. Not for the raped city—the hearts of the people cannot be conquered by force—but for the waste of those most courageous and intelligent minds, and for the lost opportunity of taking China decisively forward. A 'long revolution' is now underway, with numerous tortures and hardships, for those among the protesters who are determined to keep their convictions.

I'm going to miss those friends of mine, all of them including K. I feel I still love and trust her as I do everyone else. No matter what happened between us today, I know she would come to see me off tomorrow and will be with us before long.

I wish that we will prove strong and human enough to go through the present darkness. There is a long long way ahead.

## Reflections on the Crisis of Communist Regimes

The massacre in Tiananmen Square last June is unlikely to be the last violent expression of the deep and multiple crises—economic, social, political, ethnic, ideological, moral—which grip many Communist regimes, and which will in due course most probably grip them all. A vast ‘mutation’ is going on throughout the Communist world, and undoubtedly constitutes one of the great turning points in the history of the twentieth century. The outcome of this crisis is still an open question, though the alternatives, broadly speaking, are not difficult to list: at best, a form of regime approximating to socialist democracy, which the reform movement initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union may manage to produce; some form of capitalist democracy, with a substantial public sector; or a reinforced authoritarianism with a spreading market economy—what Boris Kagarlitsky has aptly called ‘market Stalinism’—of which China is the most conspicuous example to date. At any rate, it seems clear that the form of regime which dominated the Soviet Union from the late twenties until a very few years ago, and all other Communist

regimes from the post-war years onwards, is now unravelling in many of them, and is very likely sooner or later to unravel in them all.

We know what this immense historic process is taken to mean by the enemies of socialism everywhere: not only the approaching demise of Communist regimes and their replacement by capitalist ones, but the elimination of any kind of socialist alternative to capitalism. With this intoxicating prospect of the scarcely hoped-for dissipation of an ancient nightmare, there naturally goes the celebration of the market, the virtues of free enterprise, and greed unlimited. Nor is it only on the Right that the belief has grown in recent times that socialism, understood as a radical transformation of the social order, has had its day: apostles of 'new times' on the Left have come to harbour much the same belief. All that is now possible, in the eyes of the 'new realism', is the more humane management of a capitalism which is in any case being thoroughly transformed.

What, on the other hand, does the crisis of the Communist world signify for people who remain committed to the creation of a cooperative, democratic, egalitarian, and ultimately classless society, and who believe that this aspiration can only be given effective meaning in an economy predominantly based on various forms of social ownership? An answer to this question requires first of all a clear perception of what kind of regimes it is that are in crisis: it is only so that lessons may be properly read from their experience.

### The Primal Mould

Even though Communist regimes have differed from each other in various ways, they have all had two overriding characteristics in common: an economy in which the means of economic activity were overwhelmingly under state ownership and control; and a political system in which the Communist Party (under different names in different countries), or rather its leaders, enjoyed a virtual monopoly of power, which was vigilantly defended against any form of dissent by systematic—often savage—repression. The system entailed an extreme inflation of state power and, correspondingly, a stifling of all social forces not controlled by, and subservient to, the leadership of the party/state. The 'pluralism' which formed part of the system, and which involved the existence of a large variety of institutions in every sphere of life, from culture to sport, was not at all intended to dilute the power of the party/state, but on the contrary to reinforce it, by turning these institutions into organs of party/state control.

Why these regimes were all set in this mould also requires close attention. To begin with, all of them, by definition, went through a massive revolutionary transformation of their economic, social, political and cultural life. In some cases—Russia, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Cuba—the revolution was internally generated. In Eastern and Central Europe, on the other hand, with the exception of Yugoslavia, it was imposed by Soviet command, from above. But whether internally generated or externally imposed, these *were* revolutions, of a very thorough kind, with fundamental changes in property

relations, the elimination of traditional ruling classes, the access to power of previously excluded, marginalized and persecuted people, the complete transformation of state structures, massive changes in the occupational structure, and vast changes (or attempted changes) in the whole national culture.

However they are made, such revolutionary upheavals produce immense and long-lasting national traumas. The point hardly needs emphasis in the year of the bi-centenary of the French Revolution, an upheaval which remains to this day a subject of bitter, passionate debate and political division in France. The traumas are bound to be greatly accentuated if the revolutionary transformation is imposed as a result of external intervention and dictation; and all the more is this certain to be the case where the intervention is that of a foreign power which has traditionally been seen as an enemy. Poland is an obvious case in point. Regimes born in these conditions seldom have much legitimacy; and few Communist regimes were in fact viewed as legitimate in the eyes of a majority of their citizens.

Moreover, the problems which faced the new regimes were, in all Communist countries, aggravated by three crucially important factors. First, the revolutions were engineered or imposed in countries which, with the exception of Czechoslovakia and to a lesser degree East Germany (which became the German Democratic Republic in 1949), were at a low level of development, in some cases at an abysmally low level of economic development. This meant, among other things, that the revolution did not inherit the fruits of economic maturation: on the contrary, the revolution was turned into a means of economic development, and was therefore associated with a painful and arduous process, slow to yield beneficial results. This would have been bad enough; but, secondly, Communist regimes faced conditions of war and civil war, foreign intervention, huge losses of life and appalling material destruction. Korea and Vietnam were involved in a major war with the United States, and subjected to murderously destructive saturation bombing; and Cuba, for its part, has endured a debilitating boycott and other forms of hostile intervention on the part of the United States.

Again, there is the scarcely negligible fact that, save for Czechoslovakia, hardly any Communist regime had had any previous experience of effective democratic forms. The European states which became Communist regimes had all previously had strong near-authoritarian or actually authoritarian regimes, with very weak civil societies, in which the state, allied to semi-feudal ruling classes, had enjoyed great power and used it to exploit and oppress largely peasant populations. As for Communist regimes in Asia, and the revolutionary regime in Cuba, they had all previously been either colonial, or semi-colonial, or dependent countries, subject to oppressive external or indigenous rule, or both.

These are not the conditions in which anything resembling socialist democracy could be expected to flourish. Yet, all these factors do not adequately explain why Communist régimes, with the notable

exception of Yugoslavia after 1948, never made any serious attempt, or indeed any attempt at all, to break the authoritarian mould in which they had been cast at their birth. Neither Nikita Khrushchev's reforms nor Mao Tse-tung's Cultural Revolution constituted any such break: top-down and monopolistic rule remained unimpaired in the Soviet Union, in China and everywhere else in the Communist world. Their rulers might well argue that the circumstances of their birth had determined the character of their rule in the early years of the regime; and that they had continued thereafter to face very difficult conditions, capitalist hostility and the constrictions of the Cold War. But all this can hardly serve to explain the fact that at no time throughout the life of these regimes had their rulers felt impelled to seek a genuine relaxation of their rule in democratic directions.

### State and Society

Conservative ideologists have a simple explanation of this immobility: its roots are to be found in Marxism. In fact, Marxism has nothing to do with it. At the very core of Marx's thought, there is the insistence that socialism, not to speak of communism, entails the subordination of the state to society; and even the dictatorship of the proletariat, in Marx's perspective, must be taken to mean all but unmediated popular rule. In the unlikely event of their wishing to find textual ideological inspiration for their form of rule, Communist leaders would have sought in vain in the many volumes of Marx's and Engels's Collected Works for such inspiration. Least of all would they have found any notion of single-party monopolistic rule. They might have fared rather better with Lenin's Collected Works, but even this would have required a very selective reading and a refusal to take seriously Lenin's strictures against the 'bureaucratic deformation' of Communist rule. The real architect of the model of the rule which came to prevail in all Communist regimes was in fact Stalin, who first established it in the Soviet Union, and then had it copied by other Communist leaders nurtured in his school, or imposed it on the countries which came under his control after World War Two.

However, Stalin died in 1953, and it is not reasonable to attribute to his malign power the reason why Communist leaders chose to cling to authoritarian patterns of rule. The reason for it lies in the simple fact that it suited extremely well the people who ran the system and who came to constitute a large state bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie nurtured in the *nomenklatura*, and enjoying considerable power and privilege. No doubt, the motives of the people concerned were very mixed—certainly personal advantage, but also a kind of authoritarian paternalism, a fear of what loosening up might do not only to their position but to the nature of the regime, even a genuine belief that this was socialism, and that they were defending it against its many internal and external enemies.

But whatever the motives of those who led these regimes, their rule constituted an awful perversion of socialism. This is not to deny them various advances and achievements in economic and social terms; but it needs to be said, most of all by socialists, that they did nevertheless



contradict in a multitude of fundamental ways the democratic and egalitarian promise of socialism. Communist regimes were, and most of them remain what, some considerable time ago, I called the Soviet Union—oligarchical collectivist regimes.<sup>1</sup>

It is in their authoritarian nature, I believe, that must above all be sought the reason for the crisis which has engulfed them. For their lack of democracy and of civic freedoms has affected every aspect of their life, from economic performance to ethnic strife. It has been Mikhail Gorbachev's immense merit to have seen and proclaimed that the essential and imperative remedy for the parlous state to which the Soviet Union had been brought was democracy, and to have sought to act upon that perception. *Perestroika* came from above. But it did not come all by itself, out of the unprompted wishes and impulses of an inspired leader. It was in fact engendered by the need to enlist the cooperation and support of a population whose cynicism about its leaders had brought about a profound economic, social and political crisis. The same cynicism and alienation are at work in other Communist regimes. This may not result in *perestroika*, Soviet style, or take the forms which it has already produced in Hungary and Poland. But it is very unlikely to leave any Communist regime unaffected.

### Lessons of the Communist Experience

What lessons, then, does the Communist experience hold for Western socialists? It would of course be easy to say that it is entirely irrelevant, given the very different conditions which Western socialists confront in advanced capitalist countries with capitalist-democratic regimes. But to say this would be much too easy. How could an experience extending over some seventy years, lived under the name of socialism, however unwarranted the label, be dismissed as irrelevant and of no account? At the very least, it might point to what is *not* to be done—for instance, in regard to planning and the organization of economic life.

However, the really important lessons to be learnt by socialists from Communist experience lie elsewhere than in the realm of techniques: by far the most important of these lessons has to do with the subject of democracy. For a start, it is clear that the character of Communist rule has greatly helped to give plausibility to a claim which has been one of the most effective items in the conservative repertoire, namely that socialism was inherently authoritarian and oppressive, and that capitalism alone was capable of providing freedom and democratic rule. One of the great triumphs of dominant classes in the West has been their appropriation of democracy, at least in rhetoric and propaganda; and it can hardly be doubted that Communist practices, from elections with 99.9 per cent majorities to the brutal suppression of dissent, have been of the greatest help in the achievement of that appropriation. The simple fact of the matter is that capitalist democracy, for all its crippling limitations, has been immeasurably less oppressive and a lot more democratic than any Communist regime,

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Stalin and After', in *The Socialist Register* 1973, London 1973

whatever the latter's achievements in economic, social and other fields. Communist regimes might legitimately claim that they encouraged a far greater degree of participation in organs of power than did bourgeois democracy; but the claim was rendered spurious by the subordination of these organs to strict party and state control, with little (or no) real autonomy.

The experience of Communist regimes therefore forces upon Western socialists the need for further and deeper reflection on the exercise of power. There are, in this connection, two different issues which tend to get mixed up and which need to be disentangled. Marxists and other revolutionary socialists have always insisted that bourgeois democracy is fundamentally vitiated by the class context in which it functions, and by the degree to which the whole democratic process is undermined by the visible and the invisible power which capitalist interests and conservative forces are able to deploy vis-à-vis society and the state. Bourgeois democracy, in a context of class domination, is more often than not turned into an instrument of that domination, and also provides dominant classes with a precious element of legitimation. Also, bourgeois democracy is corrupted by the authoritarian practices to which governments in capitalist societies frequently resort; and it is vulnerable to abrogation when democratic forms threaten to turn into a serious challenge to class domination.

All this is one critique of bourgeois democracy which Marxists and others have rightly made. There is, however, a different critique, which complements the first one, and which is, in some ways, even more fundamental. This is that the kind of representative and parliamentary system which is an essential part of bourgeois democracy is *in any case*, and whatever its context, undemocratic, and that socialism requires more direct forms of expression of popular sovereignty and democratic power. Representation, in this mode of thinking, is inevitably misrepresentation, and perpetuates the alienation of the mass of people from political power which it is the purpose of socialism to overcome. Some degree of representation may be unavoidable; but it should be kept to the barest minimum, with representatives constantly and vigilantly supervised by their constituents, and subject to frequent election and recall.

This radical alternative to representative democracy is outlined in Marx's *The Civil War in France*, written as a defence and celebration of the Paris Commune, and even more specifically in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, written on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution. Such a system, Lenin said in a bitter polemic with Karl Kautsky, was 'a million times more democratic' than bourgeois democracy could ever be. Yet, it is of great significance that, by the time the claim was made, in 1919, the soviet or council system, which had emerged in the February Revolution, had all but withered, with the soviets under the ever more strict tutelage of the Communist Party.<sup>2</sup> Nor has it ever been resurrected; and 'council communism' has flourished nowhere else in the

<sup>2</sup> Soviets had of course emerged much earlier as well—in the 1905 Revolution. Originally, they were viewed with suspicion by Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

Communist world, not surprisingly since it so greatly contradicts the party dictatorship which has been the essence of Communist rule. Equally significantly, 'council communism' has had no substantial resonance in any capitalist-democratic regime. As a project, it remains what it has been since the Bolshevik Revolution—a marginal movement whose proponents constitute a small and barely audible voice in labour and socialist ranks.

This is not likely to change. Social democrats have always, and ever more emphatically, tended to accept bourgeois democracy as being synonymous with democracy *tout court*, and have shown very little concern with its limitations; and social democratic leaders have in recent times been particularly emphatic in their celebration of it. Western Communist leaders for their part have been more critical, but they have nevertheless long been wholly committed to its essential mechanisms.

### Socialism and Democracy

So too is it notable that the constitutional reforms which have occurred in the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary, have involved the rejuvenation of representative legislatures, issued from newly competitive electoral systems. The trend is likely to continue, and to spread. All reform movements everywhere, not only in Communist regimes, but in previously authoritarian regimes of the Right as well, as in Latin America, tend in the direction of what might be called traditional representative government. For the relevant future, which is likely to extend over a considerable period of time, socialists will have to wage their battles within the confines of this system. What, concretely, does this mean?

First, it means full participation in electoral, representative struggles at local, regional and national levels. It will immediately be said that this is a sure recipe for 'parliamentary cretinism', unprincipled compromise, the opportunistic dilution of programme and purpose. These are real dangers; but even if the dangers cannot be fully overcome, they may at least be greatly attenuated by a democratic, open, responsive party life, with leaders and representatives truly accountable to the members of the organizations which had made their election possible. Nor of course does participation in representative institutions exclude extra-parliamentary and extra-institutional struggles wherever such struggles are to be waged. It is idle to pretend that, even in the best of circumstances, and even with saintly good will all round, a real tension can be avoided between the demands of politics within the framework of representative democracy, and the demands of socialist principle. The alternative, amply demonstrated by long experience, is for parties intent upon radical change to remain confined in a very narrow political space. ①

The second point is that, together with their involvement in the system, socialists have to conduct a permanent critique of the limitations and shortcomings of bourgeois democracy, of its narrowness and formalism, of its authoritarian tendencies and practices. Such a critique ②

must bear on existing constitutional, electoral and political arrangements; but it also has to be directed at the hierarchical and oppressive aspects of daily life in a social order based on exploitation and domination. In other words, it is not only political arrangements which need sustained and convincing criticism; but also the exercise of arbitrary power in all walks of life—in factories, offices, schools and wherever else power affects people's lives. The notion that the battle for democracy has already been won in capitalist-democratic systems, save for some electoral and constitutional reforms at the edges, simply by virtue of the achievement of universal suffrage, open political competition and regular elections, is a profoundly limiting and debilitating notion, which has served conservative forces extremely well, and which has to be exposed and countered.

The question, however, is from what standpoint it should be exposed and countered. For many Marxists, past and present, the answer has seemed very simple. Of course, they would say, one has to function within the context of bourgeois democracy, but by having as little to do as possible with formal, electoral, cretinism-inducing procedures. The important thing was to concentrate on class struggle at the point of production, and beyond; and at some point, the class struggle would reach a moment of extreme crisis, out of the deepening and irresolvable contradictions of capitalism, and this would present the revolutionary, vanguard party with the opportunities for which it had been preparing itself over the years and decades. The moment of revolution would have arrived, the bourgeois state would be smashed, and the dictatorship of the proletariat would be proclaimed, on the basis of workers' councils and genuine as opposed to fake popular power.

The weakness of this perspective is not only that it has so far proved to be quite unrealistic, or that, as I have suggested, it has tended to ghettoize its proponents, but rather that it holds no promise whatever of avoiding the degeneration into authoritarianism which has befallen all Communist regimes. For it should be obvious that, however much an old state may be 'smashed', a new state, which really is a state, will have to replace it; and neither proclamations of its democratic credentials, nor even the good intentions of its controllers, will resolve the huge problems posed by the democratic exercise of power, particularly when vast changes in the social order are being implemented.

### Checks on Power

To tackle these problems requires that attention be paid to some quite ancient propositions. Of these, none is more important than the proposition that only power can check power. Such checking power has to occur both within the state, and also from the outside. Within the state, it involves mechanisms which Communist regimes, to their immense detriment, have spurned: the checking of the executive and the administration by an effective legislature; the independence of the judiciary; the strict and independent control of police powers; the curbing and control of official discretion. Such devices could not properly operate in Communist systems, given the superior and supreme allegiance owed by all state organs to the Party and its leaders. In the

light of this imperative requirement, it would have been idle to expect a legislative assembly to take seriously its formal constitutional powers. So too would it have been unreasonable to expect judges to make decisions that appeared to contradict what was wanted higher up.

This is not to imply that checks and balances are particularly effective in capitalist-democratic regimes, or even that they necessarily serve desirable purposes. It is only to argue that the checking of executive, administrative and police power—indeed all forms of power—is an intrinsic part of the politics of socialist democracy. Such politics cannot entail the wholesale rejection of traditional liberal principles in the conduct of government, but rather their radical extension, far beyond anything that was ever dreamt of by liberal thinkers. This means a fostering of many centres of power outside the state, in a system of autonomous and independent associations, groupings, parties and lobbies of every kind and description, expressing a multitude of concerns and aspirations woven in the tissue of society. Such pluralism can only flower in a regime where 'bourgeois freedoms' are fully guaranteed and extended, and vigilantly defended by a free press and other media, and from many other sources as well. Socialist democracy, on this view, is a system of 'dual power', in which state power and popular power complement each other, but also check each other.

Here too, it is as well to acknowledge that all this constitutes a difficult and fraught enterprise. But the whole experience of Communist regimes suggests that, in socialist terms, there is no other way. There is always bound to be a tension between what are perceived to be the needs of government by those who are in charge of it, and the claims of democracy. The crucial lesson which Communist regimes teach is that the attempt to resolve that tension by sacrificing the claims of democracy to what are taken to be the needs of government is self-defeating. What one ends up with is bad government and no democracy. What is required is the maintenance of a balance between these conflicting claims—a difficult and precarious enterprise, but an essential one.

There is also a very different dimension to socialist democracy, related to the previous one, but which is never given the requisite attention and concern: this is that socialism stands, or should by definition stand, for *human rule*. A good many years ago, in 1965, in the course of a series of interviews with Bertrand Russell for television, I asked him what he thought of Lenin. 'Lenin was a cruel man', he said, with great emphasis on the word 'cruel'. I then thought that this was an odd comment, not only because Lenin, from all accounts, was not a cruel man, but because the focus on *this* trait, true or false, seemed rather strange, irrelevant. But the concern with cruelty is of crucial importance. Political leaders may or may not be personally cruel. But the governments which they lead or of which they are members do many evil and cruel things, and tolerate, encourage and cover up many cruel actions, great and small, always of course in the name of democracy, freedom, national security, socialism, or whatever.

In the presidential campaign the Republican Party waged in the Fall

of 1988—a campaign notable for the demagogic and unscrupulous depths which it plumbed—George Bush also spoke of his desire to see 'a gentler and kinder America'. Whoever wrote these particular lines for him had the right idea. Capitalist societies are inherently incapable of bringing the idea to fruition; but it should figure very high on the socialist agenda, and be seen to be very high on its agenda. One of the worst aspects of Communist regimes has been their seeming indifference, in practice, to humane values, their bureaucratic insensitivity, their resort to arbitrary action. It would not do to overlook the appalling cruelties which their bourgeois counterparts have often perpetrated. But bourgeois politicians in capitalist-democratic regimes have been constrained in their actions by the political framework in which they have had to act, at least—and the qualification is very large—in relation to their own citizens. Communist regimes, on the other hand, have been far less constrained, or all too often hardly constrained at all, and have had ample scope for acting in arbitrary, oppressive and cruel ways. Governments, of whatever kind, can never be trusted, by their own volition, to act decently. Socialist democracy would make it one of its main tasks to build strong barriers against their acting otherwise.

There are a good many socialists who will treat this whole line of argument with the deepest suspicion. They will sternly remind us that revolution is no picnic, and that there are extremely nasty people out there who are implacably determined to prevent at all costs, not excluding any means, however foul, the kind of changes in the social order which socialism implies. This is very true. Nowhere is there likely to occur a smooth transition to socialism—on the contrary, the process is bound to be fraught with great dangers and difficulties. But the dangers and difficulties are the more likely to be diminished, the greater the popular support for and involvement in the process. That support, and its resilience and depth, are in large part dependent on the degree to which a socialist movement is able to convince a majority of people that it stands, not only for material improvement and a more rational use of resources than lies within the capacity of capitalism, but also for humane government.

For many years to come, socialists will be something like a pressure group to the left of orthodox social democracy. It is social democracy which will for a long time constitute the alternative—such as it is—to conservative governments. In this perspective, one of the main tasks for socialists is surely to turn themselves into the most resolute and persuasive defenders of the democratic gains which have been achieved in capitalist regimes, the most intransigent critics of the shortcomings of capitalist democracy, and the best advocates of a social order in which democracy is at long last liberated from the restrictions which capitalist domination imposes upon it.

August 1989

## The Upturned Utopia

The catastrophe of historical communism stands literally before everyone's eyes—the catastrophe of communism as a world movement, born of the Russian Revolution, promising emancipation of the poor and oppressed, the 'wretched of the earth'.\* The process of decomposition is continually speeding up, beyond anything predicted. This does not yet spell the end of the communist regimes, which might still last a long time by finding new forces for survival. The first great crisis of a communist state occurred in Hungary more than thirty years ago, and yet the regime did not collapse. In this respect, too, it is wiser not to make any predictions.

What cannot be denied, however, is the failure not just of the communist regimes but of the revolution inspired by communist ideology—the ideology which posed the radical transformation of a society considered unjust and oppressive into a quite different society, both free and just. The unprecedented sense of drama in the events of the last few days lies in the fact that they have not involved the crisis of a regime or the defeat of a great, invincible power. Rather, in a seemingly irreversible way, the greatest political utopia in history (I am not speaking of religious utopias) has been completely upturned into its exact opposite. It is a utopia which, for at least a century, has fascinated philosophers, writers and poets (think of Gabriel Pery's 'singing tomorrows'); which has shaken whole masses of the dispossessed and impelled them to violent action; which has led men with a high moral sense to sacrifice their own life, to face prison, exile and extermination camps; and whose unquelled force, both material and spiritual, has at times seemed irresistible, from the Red Army in Russia to Mao's Long March, from the conquest of power by a group of resolute men in Cuba to the desperate struggle of the Vietnamese people against the mightiest power in the world. In one of his early writings—why should we not recall it?—Marx defined communism as 'the solution to the enigma of history'.

None of the ideal cities described by the philosophers was ever proposed as a model to be actually realized. Plato knew that the ideal republic of which he spoke with his friends was not destined to exist in any place on earth; it was true, as Glaucon put it to Socrates, only

---

\* This article first appeared in the Turin daily *La Stampa*, 9 June 1989

'in our words'. But the first utopia that tried to enter into history, to pass from the realm of 'words' to that of things, not only came true but is being upturned, has already almost been upturned in the countries where it was put to the test, into something ever more like those negative utopias which have so far also existed only in words (one thinks of Orwell's novel).

The best proof of failure is that all those who have rebelled from time to time in these years, and with particular energy in the last few days, have called precisely for recognition of the rights to liberty that are the first prerequisite of democracy—not, please note, of 'progressive' or popular democracy, or however else it might be called to distinguish and exalt it over our democracies, but precisely of the democracy that we can only call 'liberal' and which emerged and consolidated itself through the slow and arduous conquest of certain basic freedoms. I am referring, in particular, to the four great freedoms of modern man: individual liberty, or the right not to be arrested arbitrarily and to be judged in accordance with clearly defined penal and judicial rules; freedom of the press and of opinion; freedom of assembly, which we saw captured peacefully, but contested, on Tiananmen Square; and finally—the most difficult to achieve—the freedom of association out of which free trade unions and free parties were born, and with them the pluralist society in whose absence democracy does not exist. The completion of this centuries-long process was political liberty, or the right of all citizens to participate in collective decisions that concern them.

The explosive, and seemingly irrepressible, force of the popular movements shaking the world of communist regimes stems from the fact that these great freedoms are now being demanded all at once. In Europe the State of freedoms came after the law-based State, the democratic State after the State of freedoms. But on those squares today people are simultaneously demanding the law-based State, the State of freedoms and the democratic State. The Chinese students, in one of their documents, have declared that they are fighting for democracy, freedom and law. Such a situation is objectively revolutionary. But when such a situation cannot have a revolutionary outcome—as seems to be the case in each of these countries—the resolution can only be either gradual (Poland apparently being the most advanced) or counter-revolutionary as in China, unless it develops into civil war, that well-known historical form of failed or impossible revolutions.

The conquest of the freedom of the modern world—if and insofar as it is possible—cannot but be the starting point for the countries of the upturned utopia. But to go where? I ask this question because the founding of the law-based liberal-democratic state is not enough to solve the problems which gave birth to the proletarian movement of the countries that embarked upon a savage form of industrialization, and later among the poor peasants of the Third World, the 'hope of the revolution'. The poor and forsaken are still condemned to live in a world of terrible injustices, crushed by unreachable and apparently unchangeable economic magnates on which the political authorities,



even when formally democratic, nearly always depend. In such a world, the idea that the hope of revolution is spent, that it is finished just because the communist utopia has failed, is to close one's eyes so as not to see.

Are the democracies that govern the world's richest countries capable of solving the problems that communism has failed to solve? That is the question. Historical communism has failed, I don't deny it. But the problems remain—those same problems which the communist utopia pointed out and held to be solvable, and which now exist, or very soon will, on a world scale. That is why one would be foolish to rejoice at the defeat and to rub one's hands saying: 'We always said so!' Do people really think that the end of historical communism (I stress the word 'historical') has put an end to poverty and the thirst for justice? In our world the two-thirds society rules and prospers without having anything to fear from the third of poor devils. But it would be good to bear in mind that in the rest of the world, the two-thirds (or four-fifths or nine-tenths) society is on the other side.

Democracy, let us admit it, has overcome the challenge of historical communism. But what means and what ideals does it have to confront those very problems out of which the communist challenge was born?

'Now that there are no more barbarians,' said the poet, 'what will become of us without barbarians?'

## **Marxism and the Great French Revolution**

by Paul McGarr, Alex Callinicos and John Rees

A Marxist analysis of the French Revolution of 1789, with particular attention to its intellectual background in the writings of Hegel, and the historical debate between left and right about the nature of bourgeois revolutions. This is a special bi-centenary issue of International Socialism journal.

192 pages. £2.50 / US\$4.50

## **Towards October: Trotsky 1879-1917**

by Tony Cliff

A new biography of Trotsky, covering the formative years of the 1905 revolution, the genesis of the theory of permanent revolution, and his role as organiser of the October 1917 insurrection—with special attention to Trotsky's political weakness in handling the Bolshevik-Menshevik split of 1903.

320 pages. £6.95 / US\$11.95

## **Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front**

by Leon Trotsky

Few confrontations between right and left have had such consequences as that in Germany in the 1930s. The Nazi victory was a defeat for the working class of undreamt-of magnitude. Yet it was avoidable. Trotsky's understanding of the class forces involved in this confrontation was, and remains, unparalleled.

A Bookmarks Revolutionary Classic. 272 pages. £4.95 / US\$9.50

## **The Bookmarx Club**

Our quarterly book club offers the best of new socialist publications to members at discount prices. The new summer list is just out. Write now for a free copy.

All titles are available from good bookshops; also by mail order (please add 60p / \$1.00 per title for postage) from:

### **Bookmarks London**

265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE, England. Phone 01-802 6145.

### **Bookmarks Chicago**

PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616, USA. Phone 312-666-7337.



**NEW  
TTITLES  
Summer  
1989**

## *Rational Choice Marxism: Is the Game Worth the Candle?*

Some time ago, in the pages of the *New Left Review*, a claim was made on behalf of 'rational-choice Marxism' as 'a fully fledged paradigm, which deserves to take its place beside the two other constellations of theory currently discernible within the broad spectrum of progressive social thought—namely, post-structuralism and critical theory'.\*<sup>1</sup> More than that: 'it is now only within the rational-choice context that some of the leading items on the classical agenda of Marxist theory—historical explanation and the delineation of social form, the collective dynamics of class struggle, the evolution and evaluation of capitalism—can be fruitfully discussed.' These are very large claims, and if this new 'paradigm' can even partially live up to them, it deserves the vogue it is now enjoying in the Anglo-American academy. A theoretical advance in any one of the 'leading items on the classical agenda of Marxist theory' would be a worthy accomplishment; but it would indeed be a remarkable achievement if, even without driving any likely competitors from the field, this body of thought could be shown to merit the

status of a 'fully fledged paradigm', a comprehensive theoretical 'constellation' with the explanatory range of classical Marxism.

## 1. What is Rational Choice Marxism?

There is a difficulty at the outset in evaluating the claims of RCM. What are to be our criteria of inclusion? Alan Carling tells us that 'if there is one distinctive presupposition of the intended body of work, it must be the view that societies are composed of human individuals who, being endowed with resources of various kinds, attempt to choose rationally between various courses of action.'<sup>2</sup> On the face of it, this 'distinction' places RCM in the company of a dauntingly large and heterogeneous collection of writers—only part of which is exhausted by Carling's own admission that this same 'distinctive presupposition' is 'a commonplace of that broad sweep of conventional economics and philosophy conducted in the liberal tradition.' The further specification that the 'dramatic' difference lies in RCM's 'joining of this presupposition with the classical agenda of Marxist theory' only complicates matters. To guarantee the comprehensiveness of this paradigm, its full coverage of the classical Marxist agenda, Carling is obliged to collect under its rubric a wide and disparate range of writers, at least some of whom would contest their own inclusion (he specifically acknowledges Norman Geras's disavowal of the RCM label, though without apparently accepting this self-exclusion). It is not enough to include figures like John Roemer or Jon Elster, those who would most readily accept a 'rational-choice' designation which carries the associations of game theory and methodological individualism. To make good his claims for RCM in the areas of historical explanation in general and the evolution of capitalism in particular—themes which on any conventional reckoning are central to the Marxist agenda—Carling must recruit into the RCM school writers who evince a very different attitude to methodological individualism—notably Robert Brenner and G.A. Cohen.

In other words, the 'distinctive presupposition' must remain very broadly defined indeed (so broadly, in fact, that it is difficult to see why that most 'classical' of Marxists, Friedrich Engels—who, after all, had something to say about the formation of social patterns from the unintended consequences of individual human actions—could not be taken on board). To say that this paradigm is also distinctively characterized by an 'analytic' mode of presentation (the term 'analytic Marxism' is sometimes taken to be synonymous with rational-choice Marxism) hardly advances matters, since the 'analytic' style of argumentation is in principle compatible with any set of substantive propositions. Alternatively, if the 'distinctive presupposition' is further specified, if RCM is distinguished by its game-theoretic methodological individualism, then the most distinctive characteristic of this paradigm—the formal

---

\* I am very grateful to Perry Anderson, Robert Brenner, Diane Elson, Norman Geras and Neal Wood for their comments and suggestions

<sup>1</sup> Alan Carling, 'Rational Choice Marxism', *NLR* 160, November/December 1986, p. 55. (Hereafter, this article will be cited as Carling I.)

<sup>2</sup> Carling I, pp. 26–7.

abstraction and the static, ahistorical individualism of the rational choice model—is the one which is least congenial to those central items of the Marxist agenda: social change and historical process, and in particular, the 'laws of motion' specific to various modes of production, their characteristic crises, the specific principles of motion in the transition from one mode to another.

Carling himself seems aware of the difficulty when he acknowledges that Roemer's theory of exploitation provides no substitute of its own for the 'classic' Marxist theory of history but remains 'parasitic' on that general theory (as interpreted by G.A. Cohen).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Roemer makes no pretence that his distinctive rational-choice paradigm, which he offers as a substitute for the classical theory of exploitation based on the labour theory of value, can generate its own theory of historical process. What he offers us instead is a hybrid. As Carling puts it in his recent review of Roemer's latest book *Free to Lose* ('the textbook of contemporary Marxist theory'<sup>4</sup>), Roemer's 'standard contemporary Marxism' is 'Cohen on history plus Roemer on class and exploitation'.

A sensible way to proceed, then, might be to begin with a specific definition of RCM, which recognizes the distinctiveness of its game-theoretic models and their methodological individualism, but without prejudging the capacity of this paradigm to enter into a fruitful alliance with a theory of social change and historical process from outside its distinctive methodological boundaries. This leaves us, in the first instance, with three obvious major candidates for inclusion: John Roemer, Jon Elster, and (lately) Adam Przeworski. The latter is included with some hesitation, because, although he sometimes carries the rational-choice model to extremes not envisaged even by Roemer, he is the least consistent of the three in his adherence to the paradigm, having done important political analysis which does not rely on the game-theoretic paradigm and which is, if anything, undermined by the model's theoretical demands. In what follows, the focus will be mainly on Roemer, who has provided the clearest and most comprehensive account of the RCM paradigm, with excursions into Elster and Przeworski when they help to clarify some important point or explicitly depart from Roemer in some significant way. Erik Olin Wright will be excluded from consideration simply on the grounds that his theoretical formation appears to be in a critical stage of transition: his recent book *Classes*, which constructed a theory of class on the foundations of Roemer's theory of exploitation, was almost immediately followed by an article co-authored with Andrew Levine and Elliott Sober which deflates the explanatory pretensions of methodological individualism practically to the vanishing point.<sup>5</sup> The

---

<sup>3</sup> Carling I, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Carling, 'Liberty, Equality, Community', *NLR* 171, September/October 1988, p. 95, (Hereafter, Carling II.)

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Levine, Elliott Sober, and Erik Olin Wright, 'Marxism and Methodological Individualism', *NLR* 162, March/April 1987, pp. 67–84. For an even more recent version of Wright's theory of class, see Wright et al., *The Debate on Classes*, Verso, forthcoming.

connection of Brenner and Cohen to this core group remains to be established and will be explored when we come to the question of RCM's treatment of history.

Roemer has written that 'methodological individualism', specifically in its 'game-theoretic' mode, is essential to the explication of historical materialism and its 'key propositions': 'the key questions of historical materialism,' he maintains, 'require reference to the specific forms of class struggle, and . . . an understanding of such struggles is elucidated by game theory; . . . class analysis requires microfoundations at the level of the individual to explain why and when classes are the relevant unit of analysis.'<sup>6</sup> Let us say, then, that the *differentia specifica* of RCM is a theory of exploitation and class in which various modes of exploitation and classes are logically generated according to the principles of game-theoretic analysis. This by no means reduces RCM to a purely methodological strategy. On the contrary, as we shall see, the *form* of the RCM theory is to a large extent its *substance*, and in its game-theoretic assumptions are secreted vital substantive theses about the social world.

### The Roots of Rational Choice

The elusiveness of RCM's distinctive identity may have something to do with a certain lack of critical self-awareness among its practitioners. They are remarkably insensitive to the history and context of ideas in general, and their own ideas in particular; and they are generally inclined to remain within a very narrow universe of debate. RCM-ists, to judge by the extent of their mutually self-confirming footnoting and the restricted range of controversy encompassed by their writings, seem to talk largely to each other.

Despite its characteristic ahistoricism, the provenance of the paradigm is clear enough. The roots of this game-theoretic rational-choice approach to social theory are to be found in conventional neo-classical economics and its extension to the other 'social sciences' in the work of such writers as James Buchanan, Anthony Downs, Mancur Olson, and Gary Becker. In other words, the 'rational choice' paradigm has its origins in the rebirth of right-wing thought. This is not to say that the theoretical associations of the paradigm must inevitably propel its adherents to the political right, but since this filiation is never consciously and critically confronted, the resistance of RCM's political impulses to attractions from the right is seriously weakened.

There are also, however, other intellectual contexts, less alien to Marxism, which might help to explain the emergence of RCM. The dominant school of Marxism during the period of RCM gestation was undoubtedly Althusserian structuralism. It is perhaps against the background of this Althusserian hegemony, and the excesses of its attacks on conceptions of human agency in favour of structural explanations from which the human subject was 'rigorously' expelled, that

---

<sup>6</sup> John Roemer, 'Methodological Individualism and Deductive Marxism', *Theory and Society* 11 (1982), p. 513

the attractions of the methodological individualism proposed by Roemer and Elster can be most sympathetically understood—though, as we shall see, there have been some unexpected points of convergence between these two apparently antithetical paradigms.

One more intellectual co-ordinate is worth mentioning: the analytic, formalistic mode of academic political philosophy, both liberal and conservative, which has evolved especially in the United States, as exemplified in particular by John Rawls and Robert Nozick. It is possible that RCM can most positively be conceived as an attempt to construct a *normative* socialist theory to counter the conservative philosophy of writers like Nozick. To say this, however, may be to circumscribe the claims which RCM makes for itself, to limit its application far more strictly than any of its exponents have yet been willing to do. Although Roemer in particular maintains that a principal benefit of the rational choice paradigm is that it reveals, as conventional Marxist theory cannot do, the ethical basis of Marxism, the claims for RCM as a superior *explanatory* model have been equally vigorous.

## 2. The RCM Theory of Exploitation and Class

The *locus classicus* of the RCM theory of class is John Roemer's 'general theory' of exploitation. Jon Elster has described Roemer's methodological individualism as 'generating class relations and the capital relationship from exchanges between differently endowed individuals in a competitive setting'.<sup>7</sup> More generally, Roemer's approach is an attempt to identify the 'key moment' in class exploitation by taking as his point of departure nothing more than individuals possessed of different endowments and showing how unequal distribution of the relevant assets necessarily produces unfair results, especially in the distribution of income, even without a direct transfer of labour from exploiter to exploited.

Beginning with a 'game-theoretic' model which classifies exploitative systems according to the various resources or assets that are respectively salient in each one, he concludes that people are *exploited* when they would be better off if the relevant asset were (according to his 'withdrawal' criterion<sup>8</sup>) differently allocated, and that they are *exploiters* when a reallocation of the relevant asset would leave them worse off. This definition, in accordance with the principles of game theory, requires that each mode of exploitation be defined in terms of a 'hypothetically feasible' alternative, establishing the criterion against which the status of exploiter and exploited can be assessed. So, for example, feudal exploitation entails 'differential access to freedom from bondage'; that is, 'feudal exploitation is that inequality which arises as a consequence of ties of bondage which prevent producers from freely engaging in trade, with their own assets.'<sup>9</sup> Here, the

<sup>7</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge 1983, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> According to this criterion, a 'coalition of agents' is exploited if it would be better off withdrawing from, rather than remaining within, the 'game' with its per capita share of whatever assets are relevant to the mode of exploitation in question.

<sup>9</sup> Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, Cambridge, Mass. 1982, pp. 20–21.

'hypothetical alternative' is capitalism; and the test of feudal exploitation 'is to calculate whether a person would be better off under the distribution where no feudal property exists but capitalist property still exists.'<sup>10</sup>

The essential feature of this theory is its focus on what Roemer calls 'property relations'. What he means by 'property relations' is the distribution of assets or endowments, not the social relations of production and appropriation as Marxism commonly understands them. Indeed, it is the object of this focus on 'property relations' to shift the criterion of exploitation away from the direct relations between producers and appropriators and locate it in distributional factors. Thus the traditional Marxist concept of *surplus extraction* is rejected, while the relations and processes it entails are displaced by what might be called the static and indirect 'relations' of relative advantage.

The purpose of this reconceptualization is, in particular, to explain capitalist exploitation without resorting to the labour theory of value and the concept of surplus value, which Roemer judges to be inadequate as a measure of exploitation. But he does not stop here, with the 'special' theory of capitalism. In order to provide a general theory under which the special theory of capitalism can be subsumed and which can also encompass socialism, he jettisons not only the concept of surplus value specific to capitalism but the whole notion of exploitation as the extraction of surplus labour. Unequal distribution of assets, rather than the relations between direct producers and the appropriators of their surplus labour, becomes the central focus.

This distributional theory of exploitation marks a critical departure from 'classic' Marxism. For conventional Marxism, *inequality* has no theoretical purchase except insofar as it entails a system of social relations between appropriators and producers. In those relations, and not in inequality as such, lies the dynamic principle, the contradictions and conflicts, which account for social and historical processes. The project of RCM, in direct opposition to traditional Marxism, is to construct a conception of exploitation which does not require reference to such relations. Where there is a direct link, a *class* relation, between exploiter and exploited—and not just a 'relation' of relative advantage—it is established by 'rational choice'.

Roemer's principal claim for his theory and its advantages over classical Marxism is that it can 'finesse all the criticisms of Marxian exploitation which can be made because of its reliance on the labour theory of value.'<sup>11</sup> In particular, he maintains that his 'game-theoretic formulation is superior in that it makes explicit what ethical presumption lies behind the Marxian theory of exploitation', by taking as its point of departure the alternative distribution of relevant assets against which relative advantages and disadvantages can be measured. It is, in fact, largely for the purpose of moral argumentation that he adopts his characteristic paradigm, and it is perhaps here, in its contribution to

---

<sup>10</sup> Roemer, *From 1988*, London 1988, p. 136

<sup>11</sup> Roemer, *General Theory*, p. 20.



ethical arguments about exploitation, that RCM claims have their greatest validity. But since Roemer has sought to reconstruct the whole of Marxist thought on the basis of his game-theoretic theory of exploitation, we need to consider first the explanatory implications of the initial decision to displace the relations of surplus extraction from their central position in the theory of exploitation.

### The Explanatory Consequences

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Roemer has succeeded on his own terms in constructing a foolproof demonstration that capitalism is exploitative and unjust, without resorting to the labour theory of value.<sup>12</sup> How does this procedure affect the larger project of reconstructing Marxist theory? Here it is important to keep in mind that the idea of surplus labour is not principally (or probably at all) intended to provide the kind of mathematical measure which Roemer demands for his moral indictment of exploitation in general and capitalism in particular. In any case, whatever the weaknesses of the concept as a mathematical device or even as a moral standard, they are not relevant to the one fundamental insight encased in this controversial idea: that at the foundation of social life and historical processes lie the conditions in which people have access to the means of subsistence and reproduction, and that a decisive historical break occurs when the prevailing conditions systematically compel some people to transfer part of their labour or its product to someone else. The critical datum in explaining social processes is not the quantitative measure of the 'surplus' but rather the very fact of the relationship between producers and appropriators, and the conditions in which it occurs; and this critical fact can be established without mathematical proof. Indeed, Roemer himself must begin with a tacit recognition of this fact, in order to have something to measure.

Capitalism undoubtedly represents a special case, because capitalist appropriation is not a distinctly visible act—like, say, the serf's payment of dues to the lord—which constitutes a separate act of appropriation, after the fact of the serf's labour and in the context of a visible relation between appropriator and producer. In contrast, there is no immediately obvious way of separating the act of capitalist appropriation from the process of production or from the process of commodity exchange through which capital realizes its gains. The concept of surplus *value* is meant to convey this complex relation between production, realization in commodity exchange, and capitalist appropriation.

There has been no shortage of critics, including Marxist economists, who are keen to point out the difficulties of expressing these relations in quantitative terms—that is, of measuring 'value' and 'surplus', or of relating 'value' to 'price'. But Roemer has done more than simply

---

<sup>12</sup> This is certainly not to deny that Roemer's theory of exploitation is open to criticism even on its own economic terms. See, for example, Ronald A. Krieve, 'From Necessary Illusion to Rational Choice? A Critique of Neo-Marxist Rational-Choice Theory', *Theory and Society* 15 (1986), esp. pp. 558–565. My own argument has more to do with evaluating the utility of this theory even if it succeeds on its own terms.

jettison an imperfect standard of measurement. He has elaborated a theory of capitalist exploitation which displaces the relevant social relations themselves from the centre of Marxist analysis. This may or may not be necessary to a persuasive moral argument against capitalism, but in either case, it remains to be seen whether the explanatory price is worth paying.

What, then, are the consequences of conceiving class exploitation as a 'relation' of relative advantage, or at best a 'rational' exchange between individuals, a conception in which the analytic starting point is *inequality* or the 'unequal distribution of assets', instead of a (historically constituted) *social relation* between appropriators and producers?

First, the individual and his/her 'endowments': the purpose of the RCM exercise is to break down 'macroprocesses' into their 'micro-foundations', the actions of individuals. But it turns out that RCM can achieve its objective of 'beginning' with the individual only by a sleight of hand; while the only direct relation overtly admitted by the theory is the 'rationally chosen' exchange between individuals, whole sets of relations or structures must be covertly secreted in the 'differential endowments' which constitute the individuals in question.

For example, in Roemer's definition of feudal exploitation, 'bondage'—with all the relations of power, domination and juridical dependence between lords and peasants which it entails—is treated as an attribute of individuals, what has been described as a 'relational property'. How, after all, can 'bondage' or 'freedom' be conceived as an *individual* attribute, in abstraction from relations with others? Hidden within the individual peasant's 'assets' are not only his possessions, but all the structural relations which render those possessions relevant, which, in other words, constitute them—or *some* of them—as 'assets' at all; the communal organization that maintains peasant possession in their means of subsistence; and so on. Similarly, the lord's 'assets' encompass, among other things, his location in a structure of relations which make him capable of exerting extra-economic coercion; a community of lords, a state-formation, etc. In fact, it would be impossible to characterize the relevant 'assets' without first specifying the whole system of social relations that constitute them as assets in the first place for any given individual.

Analogous problems arise in dealing with capitalism. Methodological individualism requires that the behaviour of capitalists be reducible to their individual assets and motivations, on the basis of information visible to them. (Jon Elster, the most stringent critic of Marx for his so-called 'methodological collectivism', attacks Marx's value theory, for example, on the grounds that 'individual behaviour can never be explained by reference to values, which, being invisible, have no place in the purposive explanation of action.'<sup>13</sup>) Yet the compulsions of capital accumulation cannot be derived simply from the 'optimizing strategies' of a rational individual with capital 'assets'. Those compulsions cannot be explained without reference to the competitive

---

<sup>13</sup> Elster, p. 515.

pressures of the capitalist market, indeed the whole historically constituted social structure which has made individuals in capitalist society uniquely dependent on the market for the conditions of their self-reproduction, and hence subject to the imperatives of competition and accumulation.

Having repudiated the conceptual apparatus by means of which 'classic' Marxism seeks to explain these systemic imperatives, RCM is obliged to take as given the compulsions of capitalism, and to impute them to the preferences and motivations of individual capitalists. It is no longer simply a matter of beginning with certain general assumptions about human nature; we must now take as our starting point the specific attributes of the *capitalist* nature. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the RCM model can escape a complete circularity, according to which individuals accumulate capital because they are capital accumulators. The impulse to accumulate capital itself cannot be further reduced to individual properties independent of social structures. Instead, the properties of capitalism as a social system, its systemic compulsion to accumulate, and arguably even the theory of value itself—everything that Marx sought to *explain* rather than assume—must be simply incorporated, taken for granted and not explained, into the individual 'properties' of the capitalist. And even then, since the individual capitalist cannot accommodate among his/her personal attributes all the complex transactions of capitalism which make accumulation possible as well as necessary, nor all the conditions which consistently upset the assumptions on which accumulation is based, the explanatory power of the RCM model is rather limited—without the constant intrusion of unexplained assumptions, or constant assistance from conventional Marxism. Whatever capacity the model has to clarify the issues of capital accumulation—by explicating the motivations of capitalists only on the basis of the information which is visible to them—depends on assuming first what most needs to be explained: the logic of the capitalist system which imposes the compulsion of accumulation.

At best, this means that all the important work must be done in advance of applying the RCM model, and entirely without its help. All the historical analysis which yields the structures that are to be smuggled into the attributes of the relevant individuals must be done first, very likely with the tools of conventional historical materialism; or, more precisely, the RCM model must take as given precisely what needs to be explained. Indeed, the individual 'properties' which motivate the 'rational choice' must in effect be deduced from the 'macro-processes' which are to be explained. The RCM model can 'explain' structures or 'macroprocesses' only in terms of individual motivations whose very presence must be deduced from the structures themselves.

There is no way of getting from individual choice to historical processes without inserting all these 'structural' factors, either by reading them into the individual psyche or, in a 'weaker' methodological individualism, as part of the data on the basis of which the individual's choices are made. If the model serves any useful purpose at all, it can only be in the *presentation*, but not in the construction, of an explanation.

## The Game of Class Relations

But let us accept, for a moment, the vast array of social relations and structures that are already secreted within the 'assets' and 'endowments' with which individuals enter the 'game' of class. What of the 'game' itself? At this point, the individual, however richly endowed with historical and structural presuppositions, must enter into relations with other individuals and make strategic choices. This is where unequal individual endowments and 'relations' of relative advantage need to be supplemented by 'rational choice'. Class position, according to Roemer, has to do with whether individuals work for themselves, work for others, or employ the labour of others. These positions are described as 'chosen' by people as they adopt 'optimizing' strategies which, given their respective endowments, may lead them to work for themselves, work for others, or employ the labour of others, or some combination of these options.

The notion that classes are 'chosen' immediately raises questions about the RCM model of choice. However much RCMists may appreciate that individual choices are never made in a social vacuum, there is little room in the model itself for the *social construction* of choice, for the many ways in which individual choices are structured not only by the social conditions of self-preservation and self-reproduction, by the determinate range of viable options made available within any system of social relations, but also by the complex mechanisms which operate to reproduce the system itself, including its cultural and ideological supports and their effects in the shaping of preferences. And the RCM model must begin anew with every isolated individual. It cannot accommodate the simple proposition that choices available to any single individual, or to a limited number, may not be available to all, even *with* the relevant preferences and the necessary 'assets', as the 'choice' of any particular 'optimizing strategy' by some individuals may make it less readily available to others or less economically viable in a competitive market. The reproduction of social relations cannot be explained within the strict requirements of this model except as the product of individual preferences; and even this individualistic focus is skewed by an exceptionally limited and crude psychology, which must assume a strong, stable and unchanging ego (not to mention perfect knowledge), influenced neither by its cultural and ideological environment nor by its own less conscious impulses.

But let us, for the sake of argument, take for granted the complex mechanisms of social reproduction and remain on the narrow terrain of 'rational choice'. What are the implications of the proposition that classes are constituted by choices in pursuit of 'optimizing' strategies? The consequences are, in the first instance, obscured by Roemer's emphasis on the *necessity*, even the *automaticity*, of the 'choices' which follow from the original unequal distribution of assets. It is even possible that for him the stage of 'rational choice' is an afterthought, into which he has been forced by his non-relational conception of exploitation. Some of his more enthusiastic disciples, however, have eagerly followed the path of 'rational choice' to its logical conclusions, dispensing with Roemer's assumption of

automaticity and thereby starkly exposing the major weaknesses in the RCM concept of 'choice'.

A notable example is Adam Przeworski, whose work is significant particularly because he, more explicitly and systematically than other RCM notables, has used this approach to theorize a *political* stance. Przeworski proposes to counter the conventional Marxist notion which, as he describes it, takes 'class positions as a given from which to begin the analysis', and to replace it with a view which acknowledges that 'individuals face choices, and one choice might be to become a worker and another choice might be to cooperate with other workers.'<sup>14</sup> The object of this is to understand the connection between social structure and individual behaviour, especially the connection between class conflict and politics, avoiding the assumption that certain class positions will automatically produce certain behaviours or political commitments.

It is undoubtedly wise not to assume that class positions will automatically produce certain behaviours, notably certain political commitments and actions. But there is more at stake here than a sensible injunction against simple-minded determinism. Przeworski is not content to argue that there is no necessary connection between class positions and political preferences. Instead, he asks us to treat class itself as an object of 'choice', analogous to other 'optimizing' choices, such as political preferences. Classes are 'contingent', dependent upon a 'structure of choices', not simply a reflex of production relations alone.<sup>15</sup> In fact, entering a class—e.g. becoming a worker—is treated here as analytically equivalent to joining a trade union organization or a socialist party; both constitute 'choices'—and any qualitative difference between the two kinds of 'choice' is elided.

The example constructed by Przeworski to illustrate his point reveals the presuppositions and consequences of the proposition that people choose classes as they select other 'optimizing' strategies. The exemplary worker is a certain Mrs Jones who for reasons of her own sells her labour power for a wage. Conventional Marxism (which, Przeworski argues, takes as given Mrs Jones's class position as a 'ready-made' worker and deduces from it how she should behave) cannot, he says, answer the critical question: *why* is Mrs Jones a worker? We cannot assume that she has no choice. 'After all, she owns some land, which she can perhaps sell; she is married to a machinist, who can perhaps work overtime; and she has, or will have, an accountant son, who might help her set up a resale shop.'<sup>16</sup> She chooses to become a worker because, given her objectives and resources, this is her optimizing option.

To begin with, the necessity of explaining *why* the exceptional land-owning Mrs Jones is a worker is not at all clear, nor is the explanatory power of an answer to this question. It might tell us something about

---

<sup>14</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Cambridge 1986, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Przeworski, p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Przeworski, p. 97.

Mrs Jones; but what would it tell us about other workers or about the operation of capitalism—or, indeed, about the process of 'choosing' classes? Could a landless Mr Smith be said to 'choose' his class position in the same sense as the lucky Mrs Jones? For that matter, what will we learn from this example even about the most mundanely practical conditions of class organization or politics? Of course we should not assume that Mrs Jones's political preferences will be unaffected by the fact that she is a woman, white and Catholic, as well as a worker. But why does this oblige us to obscure the difference between 'choosing' to enter a class and joining a political party? What can we learn from such procedures that would not be far more misleading than any conclusions we might draw from the traditional Marxist assumption that the logic of capitalism compels people, separated from the means of production, to sell their labour-power in order to gain access to the means of subsistence? Is it really more informative to proceed as if people entered classes in order to earn pin-money?

What is clear is that Przeworski has loaded the dice, and he has done so because his model of class formation requires it. He seems aware of how absurd this example is ('I do not cherish being an object of ridicule'<sup>17</sup>), but he is apparently unconcerned about the extent to which the whole model depends upon the analytic centrality of exceptional cases. Possibilities which could conceivably be available to any one individual, no matter how exceptional, are here given the analytic weight of choices available to *all* individuals in order to characterize class formation as the result of 'optimizing' choices. It is not only the fortunate Mrs Jones who 'chooses' her class position. The RCM model of class formation in general is constructed on the assumptions of this privileged condition.

### Choosing Classes

Przeworski here reveals what Roemer conceals. With his Mrs Jones, he may have taken the RCM model to lengths unforeseen by Roemer, but he has not fundamentally traduced his mentor's theory of class. It is in itself significant that there *are* two stages in Roemer's theory of class—first the assets, then the rational choice—and that class *relations* belong to the second stage: people find themselves with assets (of mysterious origin), and then they choose to enter a class relation—i.e. to be exploited. This formulation cannot be dismissed as simply a rhetorical or heuristic device; for however much Roemer may recognize the necessity of the 'choice', the conceptualization of class in this way has substantial consequences. A great deal follows from the premise that class *relations* are secondary and contingent, entered into—or not—by choice. Above all, in order to permit a characterization of class relations in terms which do not endanger the model of *choice* and a free exchange between individuals with different endowments, there must be a redefinition of what is at stake in the relation between classes.

According to the RCM model, the operative principle in class relations

---

<sup>17</sup> Przeworski, p. 97.

is relative advantage—not whether one party is compelled by coercion to transfer surplus labour to another, or obliged to do so in order to gain access to the means of survival and reproduction, but rather whether and to what extent each party can 'optimize' by entering the relationship. Even Roemer, who is most emphatic about the necessity of these choices, cannot avoid this voluntaristic language. The 'rational choice' model of class formation *requires* that the relevant issues be presented as having to do with 'optimization' or relative advantage rather than with compulsion or the necessities of existence itself—and herein lies perhaps the most substantial modification of 'classical' Marxism, as well as a radical weakening of its explanatory power.

For 'classical' Marxism, *compulsion* is the essence of exploitative relations. In cases where direct producers—like feudal peasants—remain in possession of the means of production, the transfer of surplus is determined by direct coercion, by virtue of the appropriator's superior force. In capitalism, the compulsion is of a different kind. The producer's obligation to forfeit surplus is a pre-condition for access to the means of production, the means of sustaining human life itself. What compels direct producers to produce more than they will themselves consume, and to transfer the surplus to someone else, is the 'economic' necessity which makes their own subsistence inseparable from that transfer of surplus labour. Thus, wage-labourers in capitalism, lacking the means to carry on their own labour, only acquire them by entering into an exploitative relation with capital. This need not, of course, mean that those who are obliged to transfer surplus labour will get *only* the barest necessities; it simply means that the transfer is the necessary condition for their access to the means of survival and reproduction—and whatever they can acquire above and beyond that with those means. Such relations can be shown to exist even in the absence of any means of quantifying a 'surplus' or measuring the relative gains of producers and appropriators. We need only acknowledge that the producer's reproduction has among its necessary conditions a relation to an appropriator who claims some part of his/her labour or product.

In defining exploitation, then, the limiting case for Marxism has to be one in which the relations between appropriator and producer are determined by the latter's compulsion to transfer surplus labour, either because of subjection to a superior force or in order to secure access to the conditions of existence. The limiting case for RCM cannot be of this kind without making complete nonsense of the element of 'choice'. Roemer himself sets up his model in the way he does, not in order to deny the compulsions which constitute exploitative relations, but rather to demonstrate that given unequal distribution of assets there can be exploitation even when everyone owns the means of production to guarantee their subsistence and even without a direct exchange of labour. But the model thereby acquires imperatives of its own—and one of its demands is the assumption that people are free not to enter the relationship at all.

The example cited by Carling in his explication of Roemer's model is

instructive. In this example, both Man Crusoe and Woman Friday begin with direct access to the means of securing material existence, though Friday possesses only a labour-intensive technology, while Crusoe enjoys a superior capital-intensive technology. Given their different 'endowments', they enter into a relationship, each one seeking to guarantee subsistence with the least effort. Although their assets are unequal, there is no suggestion that C has the power to coerce F into forfeiting surplus labour or to deprive her of the conditions of existence. The issue between them is simply the extent to which F's labours will be to the relative advantage of C, in the sense that F (though better off than before entering into a relationship with C) does not get the full benefit of her labours, part of which accrues to C. The 'equality' between C and F—their 'equality as rational actors'—which the model demands, requires minimally that both (though not equally endowed) have direct and sufficient access to the means of subsistence. What is at stake is never more than 'optimizing' or 'maximizing'. Carling then proceeds to characterize the *power* relations between C and F in terms of the 'maximum damage' or 'ultimate sanctions' each party can bring to bear on the other (p. 44). Here, he truly gives the game away. The ultimate penalty is measured simply in days of work: the number of days' work over and above F's 'best option' which C can impose on F by withdrawing from the 'game', and the number of days' work which F's withdrawal would subtract from C's 'best option'.

The model thus begins by—indeed depends upon—removing both forms of compulsion which have historically operated in class exploitation: the 'economic' necessities of capitalism and the 'extra-economic' coercions of pre-capitalist formations. Combining the best of both worlds, Carling offers us two 'free and equal' individuals, neither one subject to the superior force of the other, yet both in possession of the means of production. The transfer of surplus is not determined by direct coercion, nor is it a condition of access to the means of self-reproduction. The assumptions of this benign—and completely imaginary—condition are then transposed to real capitalism, where one of the parties begins with no access to the means of production and has only labour-power to sell. The issue between worker and capitalist is still presented on the principles of Carling's limiting case, as if the issue were still just 'optimization'. Even survival itself is effectively treated as simply a specific instance of 'optimization' only quantitatively different from any other good.

### Lowering the Stakes

RCMists may argue that the choice to live or die is not the analytically relevant one in questions of class. Sometimes this means simply that, at least in principle, for any given individual (like Przeworski's Mrs Jones) there may be other options than selling labour-power to a capitalist—options such as begging, street-vending, busking, living on welfare, relying on family support, or even leaving the working class to become self-employed. This is not a serious objection to regarding survival as the ultimate stake in capitalist class relations. From the point of view of explaining social and historical patterns, it makes a



critical difference how widely available such options are; and a society in which, say, street-vending were as available an option as wage-labour would be structurally very different from one in which it is only an exceptional possibility. The other argument for weakening the compulsion involved in class relations is to say that selling labour-power is not the only option but the only *acceptable* one (perhaps coupled with Elster's observation that a choice made out of necessity is still a choice<sup>18</sup>). It is probably safe to say that all RCMists, and not just Roemer, recognize what is finally at stake. The important point, however, is that their model so absolutely requires that the stakes be relatively low and non-coercive that they must give a preponderant analytic weight to exceptional contingencies and marginal possibilities.

But even if we grant the premise that there are in principle other ways to survive, there still remains a critical difference between choosing ways of surviving and simply 'optimizing', in the sense of choosing to be 'better off'. The RCM model depends on blurring this distinction too. Finally, the model requires us to ignore the ways in which even the means of escaping the necessity of transferring surplus labour are themselves determined by the dominant conditions of acquiring access to the means of production in any given class regime. So, for example, the welfare system and unemployment benefits in a capitalist system are determined by the logic of capitalist exploitation and its roots in the complete separation of the worker from the means of production. It is precisely because the logic of the capital relation for the worker means that s/he must sell his/her labour power or starve, that institutional means of preventing starvation had to be created—but only to the extent that they did not completely undermine the logic of the capital relation itself (for instance, by making such options too widely available).

There may be certain situations in which the stress on choice rather than on compulsion in relations of exploitation has rhetorical advantages; but on the whole, the costs of this focus far exceed the benefits. The effect is to make this theory of class finally indistinguishable from conventional stratification theories (common to both bourgeois social science and liberal ideology), in which the location of class divisions is more or less arbitrary because there is no qualitative break in the distributional continuum and no focal point of class antagonisms or conflicts of interest. In fact, in the final analysis Roemer (and indeed, Erik Olin Wright in his elaboration of Roemer's theory of class) can give no consistent account of class which goes beyond identifying *income differentials* as the essential criterion.<sup>19</sup> If the principal criterion of exploitation is an indirect relation of relative advantage, and especially when the issue for both parties in such 'relations of comparison' is simply 'optimization'—in contrast to the Marxist theory of class exploitation which emphasizes the coercive relation between those who are compelled to transfer surplus and those who appropriate it—the unequal distribution of 'assets' can have no significance

<sup>18</sup> Elster, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of this point, see Peter Meiksins, in Wright et al., *The Debate on Class*.

apart from its merely distributional consequences, its effects in producing inequalities of income.

### Elster: A 'One-Sided' View?

Elster here departs in some significant ways from Roemer. He is aware of many of the difficulties in Roemer's non-relational theory of exploitation and its extension to class, noting in particular its inadequacy in *causal* explanation (for example, in accounting for social conflict<sup>20</sup>), which requires, among other things, a more systematic acknowledgement of *power* relations. The same strictures would apply to Roemer's theory as those Elster levels against 'stratification' theories which focus on 'relations of comparison' as distinct from 'relations of interaction'. Yet Elster's 'relations of interaction' are themselves constricted, and limited in their explanatory value, by a similar view of what is at stake in the relation between classes, a view which is demanded by the imperatives of the rational choice model.

In his own account of rational choice models, and 'intentional' models in general, Elster makes reference to some passages from Marx in order to demonstrate that there are times when Marx himself adopts intentional explanations, though inconsistently and in contradiction to many of his basic assumptions. Elster's interpretation of these passages is revealing. It is not the object here to deny Marx's emphasis on human agency, choice and purpose, but rather to demonstrate how Elster's interpretation of Marx is distorted by his own understanding of the issues at stake in the relation between classes. Elster cites the following passage from the *Grundrisse* as an example of Marx's emphasis on choice:

[The worker] is neither bound to particular objects, nor to a particular manner of satisfaction. The sphere of his consumption is not qualitatively restricted, only quantitatively. This distinguishes him from the slave, serf etc. Consumption certainly reacts on production itself, but this reaction concerns the worker in his exchange as little as it does any other seller of a commodity . . . [The] relative restriction on the sphere of the workers' consumption (which is only quantitative, not qualitative, or rather only qualitative as posited through the quantitative) gives them as consumers an entirely different importance as agents of production from that which they possessed e.g. in Antiquity or in the Middle Ages, or now possess in Asia.<sup>21</sup>

Elster's purpose is to demonstrate a contradiction (he is generally more interested in seeking out inconsistencies in Marx's theory than in working out its fruitful insights) between this emphasis on the worker's consumer choice and passages in which 'Marx comes close to suggesting that the consumption of the worker is uniquely determined by his need to reproduce his labour-power.'<sup>22</sup> Marx, argues Elster, 'had strong theoretical reasons for wanting to keep workers' consumption fixed, since otherwise the labour value of goods might depend on preferences.'

---

<sup>20</sup> Elster, pp. 203, 335-42

<sup>21</sup> Elster, p. 12, Marx, *Grundrisse*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 283

<sup>22</sup> Elster, p. 11

Without engaging in a dispute about the labour theory of value, we should note the confusion of issues in Elster's interpretation. In the 'non-choice' passages, Marx is seeking to explain the conditions in which the worker under capitalism gains access to the means of subsistence through the exchange of labour-power for a wage. In the *Grundrisse* passage cited by Elster as an example of Marx in his RCM mode, he is analysing the exchange between labour and capital first in a 'one-sided' way, that is, simply in the 'sphere of circulation'. Marx makes it clear, in words elided from Elster's quotation, that he is for the moment examining the capitalist relation incompletely, 'as regards mere circulation'. At this level of analysis, the freedom of choice may be relevant, as is the 'equality' between capital and labour as parties to the exchange. Marx is here also alluding to a unique relation between consumption and production which characterizes capitalism. But he goes on to emphasize that the worker's equality and liberty as a party to the exchange (as well as his/her freedom as a consumer) has as its presupposition 'an economically different relation—outside that of exchange',<sup>23</sup> a relation which is indeed masked by the exchange. It may appear to the worker, and 'to a certain degree on the other side', that the object of the exchange is (*on both sides*) to obtain 'exchange value' or wealth (with the possibility of such an illusion being specific to capitalism). But, Marx continues:

what is essential is that the purpose of the exchange for him [the worker] is the satisfaction of his need. The object of his exchange is a direct object of need, not exchange value as such. He does obtain money, it is true, but only in its role as coin; i.e. only as a self-suspending and vanishing mediation. What he obtains from the exchange is therefore not exchange value, not wealth, but a means of subsistence, objects for the preservation of his life, the satisfaction of his needs in general, physical, social etc. It is a specific equivalent in means of subsistence, in objectified labour, measured by the cost of production of his labour.

The last sentence, of course, suggests that Marx is even here adhering to precisely the view which this passage, according to Elster, is supposed to contradict. This should have been enough to put Elster on his guard against facile accusations of inconsistency. But the critical point is that, while at one level of analysis—that which relates to the one-sided sphere of circulation—the worker's consumer choice may be relevant, at the other—in the account of the fundamental relation between capital and labour which is 'presupposed' by the exchange between them—what is essential is the *necessity* of the exchange as a means for the worker to secure the conditions of survival and reproduction. The fact that workers are not constrained by their relation to the means of production to choose any specific food, for example, is not what determines their position as exploited producers. The important factor here is that, since people are not in any meaningful sense free to choose *not* to eat, their situation is determined by the conditions in which they may gain access to food at all.

It is significant that the issue for Elster is an alleged contradiction in Marx between two different accounts of the worker as *consumer*. He

---

<sup>23</sup> *Grundrisse*, p. 284.

has a tendency in general to depict class struggle as the 'maximization' of 'consumer bundles', and shows a fondness for Weber's characterization of class systems in terms of different kinds of 'market' relations. Among the theories of development he attributes to Marx, he seems happiest with a periodization (of his own construction) in which the 'dynamic element' is *trade*.<sup>24</sup> Elster, in short, generally stops at the 'one-sided' analysis which remains in the 'sphere of circulation', indeed seems wholeheartedly to adopt the *illusion* fostered by capitalism concerning what is at issue in the capital relation, without unmasking the other relation which is the 'presupposition' of the exchange between capital and labour.

Elster does, after all, have what he would call 'strong theoretical reasons' for characterizing the relation between capital and labour in this one-sided way, since it is only as an exchange 'as regards mere circulation' that the rational choice model makes any sense at all. The model is not much use—and the notion of 'choice' has not much meaning—in explaining the '*presuppositions*' of the exchange between capital and labour. Or, to be more precise, the model can deal with those presuppositions only by transposing to them assumptions derived from the 'sphere of circulation'.

In fact, the RCM model in general seems to depend upon a resolute adherence to the 'sphere of circulation', in the manner of bourgeois ideology. More than that, the premises on which the whole model is based, even as it is applied to non-capitalist societies, represent a generalization of assumptions specific to capitalism—the assumptions of 'freedom', 'equality', and market-rationality—and to capitalism only as viewed in a 'one-sided' way.

### Costs and Benefits

If the object of Rational Choice Marxism is to improve on classical Marxist explanation by breaking down 'macrostructures' into 'micro-foundations', it seems not to have got us very far. At best, this procedure yields very modest results. Just how modest the pay-off really is has been persuasively illustrated by Levine, Sober and Wright in their discussion of Elster's attempt to subject the problem of class formation to the rigours of his methodological individualism. The results produced by their attempt to rescue some explanatory power for Elster's methodological individualism, while in some respects uncontroversial and sensible, are on the whole predictable and uninteresting. 'Class formation' here has nothing to do with the historical processes which produce class relations. Instead, it refers to the process of *organization* 'by which classes are constituted as collective actors in class struggles'<sup>25</sup>—and even this in a very limited sense. At this level of analysis, the problems of 'class formation' are simply the problems faced by organizations in the attempt to mobilize support within their potential class constituencies. We learn, for example, that, since individuals are more likely to engage in action if they have some

---

<sup>24</sup> Elster, pp. 310–17, 180 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Levine, Sober and Wright, p. 80.

assurance that they will not be left holding the bag, organization and leadership are needed to provide an 'indirect communication network' which will convince them 'that they will not be "suckers" in collective struggles.'<sup>26</sup> This is, to be sure, a useful axiom of political organization, but it is scarcely a startling revelation (or one that requires RCM theory); and if this is the depth of insight offered by RCM, it hardly seems worth the trouble.

Besides, there are costs to offset even these modest benefits. The adjustment of the stakes in the game of class to meet the needs of the RCM model illustrates the extent to which the (purely 'heuristic?') *form* of the game-theoretic method has been allowed to dictate the *substance* of RCM theory. This may mean, among other things, that there is a closer connection between the substantive theses of Marxism and its methods or 'tools' than RCM allows, making it rather more difficult to carry out the RCM proponents' often stated project of separating the two in order to defend the substance of Marxism by conventional analytic methods or 'the standard tools of microeconomic analysis'.<sup>27</sup> There is precious little left of historical materialism by the time RCM has finished begging all its questions and trivializing the stakes in the game. By returning to a distributional model of capitalism and severing the connection between the various 'moments' of the capitalist process, the RCM theory of exploitation has overturned every one of the central principles which Marx laboured so long to establish in his critique of political economy. If this reconceptualization had produced a paradigm with a superior explanatory power, such departures from classical Marxism could only be welcomed. As it is, we seem to have moved backward to a pre-Marxist understanding instead of forward beyond Marxism.

And one more curious result: this approach, for which Alan Carling has claimed the distinction of solving the old conundrum of structure and subject by 'the reinstatement of societies as sets of relationships among individuals'<sup>28</sup> (what, then, are social relations for 'classical' Marxists like Marx himself?), has instead produced exactly the opposite effect. Laden with 'endowments' in the form of a whole system of social relations and structural necessities, the 'individual' turns out to be an embodied structure; and when the moment of 'choice' arrives, there is nothing important left to do. In the end, the principal function of 'choice' in the model is not to reinstate the subject but to render class contingent and ineffectual as a historical and political force.

### 3. Is There an RCM Theory of History?

We need to be reminded why Marxism ascribes a determinative primacy to class struggle. It is not because class is the only form of oppression or even the most frequent, consistent, or violent source of social conflict, but rather because its terrain is the social organization

<sup>26</sup> Levine, Sober and Wright, p. 82.

<sup>27</sup> Roemer, *From to Last*, p. 172.

<sup>28</sup> Carling I, p. 30.

of production which creates the material conditions of existence itself. The first principle of historical materialism is not class or class struggle, but the organization of material life and social reproduction. *Class* enters the picture when access to the conditions of existence and to the means of appropriation are organized in class ways, that is, when some people are systematically compelled by differential access to the means of production or appropriation to transfer surplus labour to others.

It is no doubt possible to identify transfers of surplus labour which are not determined by such coercive imperatives (e.g. gifts, the fulfilment of kinship obligations), but these are not the kind to which the concept of class specifically refers. It is also important to acknowledge that class may not always entail direct relationships, in the sense of face-to-face confrontations, between exploiter and exploited, and that in the absence of such confrontations, class relations may not generate conflict as readily as other, more direct non-class antagonisms may do.<sup>29</sup> But class conflict has a particular historical resonance because it implicates the social organization of production, the very basis of material existence. Class struggle has a distinctive potential as a transformative force because, whatever the immediate motivations of any particular class conflict, the terrain of struggle is strategically situated at the heart of social existence. A trivialization of the issue between classes cannot but deprive the concept of class of its explanatory power. There can be no denying that it is difficult to imagine epochal transformations generated by games in which the stakes are relative advantages in access to 'consumer bundles'.

Given these limitations, what kinds of claims can be made for RCM in the explanation of history? It is not altogether clear how much Roemer *et al.* want to claim for themselves. Carling, as we have seen, appears to concede that on the question of historical transformations—from one system of exploitation, one regime of property, one distribution of endowments, one mode of production, to another—RCM theory must remain 'parasitic' on some other general theory of history. Roemer *sometimes* (though not always<sup>30</sup>) appears to share this modest view, generally refraining from any claim to provide a dynamic model of transformation, as distinct from a kind of 'comparative statics'—even a theory of capitalist accumulation or crisis, let alone a theory of epochal transformations. This does not, however, prevent him from associating his own theory of exploitation and class with the theory of historical materialism as interpreted by G.A. Cohen. In general, Carling has struck more or less the right note by drawing a line between RCM's efforts to construct a theory of exploitation and class, and its attempts to establish a connection with a theory of history borrowed from elsewhere.

In his review of *Free to Lose*, Carling addresses himself more specifically

---

<sup>29</sup> See Elster, pp. 338 ff.

<sup>30</sup> In 'Methodological Individualism and Deductive Marxism', for example, Roemer seems to be arguing that methodological individualism of the type advocated by Elster is essential to the explanation of historical transformations and superior to conventional Marxism in this respect.

to Roemer's ventures into history. One of the major reservations in this otherwise respectful review concerns Roemer's treatment of the theory of history. The objection is that Roemer fails to resolve what appears to be a fundamental contradiction between the two principal accounts of history on which he draws: Cohen's theory of history, and Robert Brenner's historiography, the latter being 'the most systematic presentation of the evidence in the case [the development of capitalism] which is the acid test for the truth of the whole theory.'<sup>31</sup> The problem, Carling suggests, is the inconsistency between Cohen's attribution of primacy to the forces of production and Brenner's to class struggle; and he questions the force of Roemer's facile response that Brenner's evidence concerning the emergence of capitalism in the historically specific conditions of England does not contradict Cohen's reading of historical materialism, with its general law of technological determinism, because a difference of 'a few centuries' in the development of capitalism in different parts of Europe hardly matters.<sup>32</sup>

The question for Carling is which of the two accounts of history is a more suitable match for Roemer's theory of class and exploitation. Roemer, he says, seems to be offering us "'Cohen on history plus Roemer on class and exploitation" as standard contemporary Marxism'; but, suggests Carling, given Cohen's use of functional explanation, as distinct from what he takes to be Brenner's rational-choice explanation, it might be more methodologically consistent to propose 'Brenner on history plus Roemer on class and exploitation'—even though this option would be taken 'at the cost of depriving Marxism of the support it traditionally thought it enjoyed from the theory of history'.<sup>33</sup>

There are several points to be made about this judgment, even before we attempt to choose between 'Cohen plus Roemer' and 'Brenner plus Roemer'. Posing the question in this way—Roemer plus what?—reaffirms the discontinuity between RCM and the theory of history. The implication is that the theory of exploitation and class, for which the rational choice model is supposed to be well adapted, cannot generate its own theory of history and may indeed be incompatible with any theory of history at all. This unhappy conclusion is based not only on a clear-sighted recognition of RCM's undynamic character, but also on a particular view of what counts as a theory of history. Like other RCM-ists, not least Roemer himself, Carling has no doubt that a theory of history (as distinct from, say, a 'special' theory of capitalism) must be a super-general, indeed *trans*historical, account which posits some universal law of historical change in a determinate direction—not

<sup>31</sup> Carling II, p. 95. The relevant reference for G.A. Cohen is *Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford 1978. The principal references for Robert Brenner are 'The Social Basis of Economic Development', in J. Roemer, ed., *Analytical Marxism*, Cambridge 1985; 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *NLR* 104, July/August 1977, pp. 25–92; and *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin eds., Cambridge 1985.

<sup>32</sup> Carling II, p. 95, and Roemer, *From Feudalism to Capitalism*, pp. 123–4.

<sup>33</sup> Carling II, p. 95.

even just some common mechanism (such as class struggle, the outcome of which is variable and indeterminate and which has its own historically specific rules and conditions in every particular social form), but rather a general law, a 'deep cause', that transcends all historical particularities. Thus Cohen has a theory while Brenner has only historiography.

An attempt to resolve the Cohen-plus-Roemer v. Brenner-plus-Roemer issue may tell us as much as we need to know about RCM and its relation to the theory of history. Let us first try to reconstruct Roemer's argument. One thing is clear: Roemer, despite some reservations, still associates himself with historical materialism as a theory of history, and for him this means (evidently without question) Cohen's technological determinism.<sup>34</sup> It remains to be seen whether he is wrong to think—as Carling suggests he may—that his own theory of exploitation and class can be consistently coupled with Cohen's theory of history, and whether Carling is right to propose that Brenner would make Roemer a more suitable march.

### Roemer on History

History, according to Roemer, takes the form of an evolution in property relations, in which 'progressively fewer kinds of productive factors remain acceptable as property'.<sup>35</sup> For example, property in persons is eliminated as slave society passes into feudalism, leaving some property rights in the labour of others and property in alienable means of production. The transition from feudalism to capitalism eliminates property rights in the labour of others while still allowing property in the alienable means of production, and so on. This 'progressive socialization of property' occurs for reasons 'related to efficiency', that is, the advancement of the forces of production. 'The mechanism that brings about this evolution is class struggle', but 'the reason such an evolution occurs lies somewhere deeper: evolution occurs because *the level of development of the technology outgrows the particular form of the social organization, which comes to constrain and fetter it.*'<sup>36</sup>

The connection between the mechanism (class struggle) and the deep cause (technological determinism) can be explained in the following way. Class struggle serves as a 'facilitator' in the transition from one social form to another, when the 'dissonance' between the level of development of productive forces and the old economic structure reaches a crisis point. So, for example, Roemer asks us to 'imagine' (his word) a feudal system, with lords and serfs, but one in which 'a nascent capitalist economy is emerging alongside' the feudal system.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Roemer, *From Feudalism to Capitalism*, p. 108.

<sup>35</sup> Roemer, *From Feudalism to Capitalism*, p. 126.

<sup>36</sup> Roemer, *From Feudalism to Capitalism*, p. 6. Emphasis in the original. Given RCM's need to lower the stakes in the game of class, it may be significant that Roemer chooses to emphasize the progressive socialization of property as the *elimination* of exploitative forms, in contrast to Marx's focus on history as the progressive separation of direct producers from the conditions of their labour (this is, for example, the basic premise of the *Grundrisse*).

<sup>37</sup> Roemer, *From Feudalism to Capitalism*, p. 115.



'Now there is an option: capitalists and feudal lords can compete for control of the working population. If the technology or forces of production that the capitalists are using enables them to pay higher real wages than serfs can earn, then there is an economic advantage to the liberation from serfdom that did not formerly exist.' Serfs can become independent peasants, taking advantage of the trade opened up by the capitalists, or they can become artisans or proletarians in the towns. 'The competition between feudalism and capitalism now enables class struggle against feudalism to be successful even though formerly it was not.'

We now have three levels of explanation: (1) the deep cause (technological determinism); (2) the historical process (the successive elimination of forms of exploitation or the progressive socialization of property); (3) the 'facilitator' (class struggle—though this only 'facilitates' a process that was 'bound to come sooner or later'<sup>38</sup>). It is not entirely clear at what level the rational choice model should be introduced. The most obvious place is in class struggle, which implies that change occurs when (if not because) people are in a position to choose the available option of the next, more progressive mode of production. At the same time, there appears to be an overarching rational choice, at the level of the deep cause, having to do with 'the ceaseless effort of rational human beings to alleviate their conditions of scarcity'<sup>39</sup>—though they do not actually choose the next available economic structure *because* it is conducive to technological progress. In either case, the necessary link between the rational-choice model and the theory of history is the presupposition that there is a direct correspondence between the self-interested actions of individual rational actors and the requirements of technical progress and economic growth.

This three-layered structure raises rather more questions than it answers, not least about the connections among its three levels. Are rational individuals, insofar as they are the makers of history (but are they?), motivated by the desire to alleviate scarcity through technological improvement or by the wish to escape exploitation—or neither? Is class struggle necessary or not; and if not, what is the mechanism of historical change? Or does the deep cause somehow make mechanisms and facilitators redundant, since change is somehow 'bound to come sooner or later' anyway, behind the backs of rational individuals? And where, in any case, is the *struggle* in class struggle? We have lords and capitalists competing to give more attractive terms to producers, to serfs who might want to become proletarians; and we have serfs escaping from lords—apparently without constraints, and willingly giving up their rights of possession—as soon as a more attractive option comes along; but *struggle*...? What, indeed, is the 'economic advantage' which would impel serfs to prefer a wage which, by some sophisticated statistical measure, was higher than their 'earnings' as serfs, at the cost of losing their rights of possession, giving up the land which provides them with full and direct access to

<sup>38</sup> Roemer, *From Feudalism*, p. 124

<sup>39</sup> Roemer, *From Feudalism*, p. 123

the means of subsistence in exchange for the uncertainties of the proletarian condition? For that matter, even if serfs choose this option, how do they manage to achieve it? If the lords' property 'rights' in the labour of others have anything to do with the 'control'—i.e. the power—that they exercise over the serfs, what is the nature of that 'control', and how is it that when the critical moment of transition comes, serfs can simply choose to escape the lord's 'control' just because a more eligible option has presented itself? Has feudalism no self-sustaining logic and resources of its own to resist this easy transition?

All this is quite apart from the fact that the whole edifice is constructed without benefit of evidence. Roemer has chosen his words carefully when he asks us to 'imagine'. We can hardly do anything else. ('Imagine' and 'suppose' are the basic vocabulary of this game-theoretic discourse.) We are not (or not always) being asked to believe that this is how things actually happened, or even that it was historically possible for them to happen in this way, only that it is logically conceivable that they did (though it is never made clear why we should be interested in such imaginary logical possibilities). Indeed, it is very unlikely that Roemer himself believes his own imaginary account of the transition to feudalism; and it is a measure of the price exacted by his game-theoretic model that it obliges him to set aside everything he undoubtedly knows about the power relations between lords and serfs, the dispossession of small producers and the concentration of landlordly property which were the conditions of the transition; everything, that is, about coercion, compulsion, imperatives, or indeed about the *social relations* of exploitation. This process of transition which Roemer asks us to 'imagine' evidently has little to do with history, and it would serve no purpose to counter this imaginary story with evidence. History is, apparently, a subject about which we can say anything we like.

### Begging the Question

There is one thing that Roemer asks us to 'imagine' which is inescapably critical to his argument, an assumption upon which the whole shaky edifice rests and which goes to the very heart of RCM and its relation to history. We *must* accept that capitalism already exists as an 'option', that a 'nascent capitalist economy is emerging alongside' the feudal system. We must also never ask how this came to be so, though for Roemer this evidently presents no problem:

According to historical materialism, feudal, capitalist, and socialist exploitation all exist under feudalism. At some point feudal relations become a fetter on the development of the productive forces, and they are eliminated by the bourgeois revolution. . . . Historical materialism, in summary, claims that history progresses by the successive elimination of forms of exploitation which are socially unnecessary in the dynamic sense.<sup>40</sup>

He goes on to characterize this interpretation as 'a translation of the technological determinist aspect of historical materialist theory into

---

<sup>40</sup> Roemer, *General Theory*, pp. 270–71.

the language of the theory of exploitation'. According to this interpretation of historical materialism, all successive forms of exploitation are already contained in the preceding ones (his account of the progress from slave society to capitalism suggests that this retrospective analysis goes back beyond feudalism), so that all forms of exploitation which have emerged in the course of history have apparently been present since the beginning; and history proceeds by the process of elimination.

A similar conflation has, of course, already occurred at the elemental level of Roemer's rational choice model, in the very foundations of his general theory of exploitation, where every mode of exploitation is defined in terms of its alternative, the successor mode which is already (or rather, still) present in the existing one. Remember, for example, the 'test' for feudal exploitation in terms of its 'hypothetically feasible alternative': 'to calculate whether a person would be better off under the distribution where no feudal property exists but capitalist property still exists.'<sup>41</sup> In Roemer's account of history, the 'hypothetical' alternative turns out to be an actually existing one, indeed the very next historical stage which happens to be already present in embryo.

It has been a favourite ploy of theorists who have trouble with *process* to beg the question of history by assuming that all historical stages—and especially capitalism—have in effect existed, at least as recessive traits, since the beginning. The perennial quality of capitalism has been a staple of bourgeois ideology, and also a common assumption of influential historians like Henri Pirenne. The usual approach in those Marxisms that go in for this kind of thing—the most recent and well-developed example is Althusserian structuralism—is to conjure up images of aspirant modes of production lurking in the interstices of previous ones, waiting only for the opportunity to establish their 'dominance' when certain obstacles are removed. The Althusserian concept of 'social formation', in which any and all modes of production can coexist without any need to explain their emergence, has done yeoman service in this regard. But Roemer has truly perfected this strategy, with his theory of elimination (it seems so much easier somehow to account for the demise of what already exists than to explain its coming into being). There can be no doubt that this kind of conceptual conjuring has far too often served in place of a Marxist theory of history; and, no doubt, Marx's more formulaic aphorisms about the stages of history and successive modes of production could be read as invitations to evade the issue of historical processes in this way. It was Marx, after all, who first spoke of 'fetters' and 'interstices'. But there is much more in Marx which demands that we look for the key to historical change in the dynamic logic of existing social relations without assuming the very thing that needs to be explained.

Brenner plus Roemer?

This is the point at which we can best judge the compatibility of

---

<sup>41</sup> Roemer, *From to Last*, p. 136

Roemer's RCM with Robert Brenner's approach to history, for Brenner's primary purpose has been precisely to break the prevailing habit of begging the central historical question, the practice of assuming the existence of the very thing whose emergence needs to be explained. He distinguishes between two kinds of historical theories in Marx's own work, the first still heavily reliant on the mechanical materialism and economic determinism of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the second emerging out of Marx's mature critique of classical political economy. The first is characterized precisely by its begging of the question, invoking the self-development of productive forces via the division of labour which evolves in response to expanding markets, a 'nascent' capitalism in the womb of feudal society.

The paradoxical character of this theory is thus immediately evident: there really is no *transition* to accomplish since the model starts with bourgeois society in the towns, foresees its evolution as taking place via bourgeois mechanisms [i.e. change and competition leading to the adoption of the most advanced techniques and to concomitant changes in the social organization of production. *EMW*], and has feudalism transcend itself in consequence of its exposure to trade, the problem of how one type of society is transformed into another is simply assumed away and never posed.<sup>42</sup>

Later, Marx was to pose the question very differently. He substantially revised his views on property relations in general and pre-capitalist property relations in particular: 'In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, Marx defines property relations as, in the first instance, the relationships of the direct producers to the means of production and to one another *which allow them to reproduce themselves as they were*. By this account, what distinguishes pre-capitalist property relations... is that they provided the direct producers with the full means of reproduction.' The condition for maintaining this possession was the peasant community, and its consequence was that the lords required 'extra-economic' means of taking a surplus, which in turn demanded the reproduction of their own communities. The structure of these property relations was thus reproduced 'by communities of rulers and cultivators which made possible the economic reproduction of their individual members.'<sup>43</sup> Given these property relations, reproduced by communities of rulers and direct producers in conflict, the individual lords and individual peasants adopted the economic strategies that would best maintain and improve their situation—what Brenner calls their rules of reproduction. The aggregate result of these strategies was the characteristic feudal pattern of development. The transition to a new society with new developmental patterns thus entailed not simply a shift from one mode of production to another alternative mode, but a *transformation* of existing property relations, from feudal rules of reproduction to new, capitalist rules. Under these, the separation of direct producers from the means of production, and the end of 'extra-economic' modes of extraction would leave both appropriators and producers subject to competition, and able to move in response

<sup>42</sup> Robert Brenner, 'Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism', in *The First Modern Society*, A.L. Beier et al., eds., Cambridge 1989, p. 280

<sup>43</sup> Brenner, 'Bourgeois Revolution', p. 287.

to the requirements of profitability under competitive pressures. This inevitably raised a new and different question about the transition from feudalism to capitalism: 'it was the problem of accounting for the transformation of pre-capitalist property relations into capitalist property relations via the action of pre-capitalist society itself.'<sup>44</sup>

This is the challenge which Brenner has taken up: to offer an explanation of the transition to capitalism which relies entirely on the dynamics of feudal relations, and its conditions of *reproduction*, without reading capitalism back into its predecessor or presenting it as an available option.<sup>45</sup> This project also requires an acknowledgement that pre-capitalist property relations have a logic and tenacity of their own, which cannot be conjured away by the convenient assumption that people are driven by an urge to take the next available (capitalist) option, an urge that existing structures cannot resist. This is something which Roemer's model is systematically unable to take into account. In this respect, Roemer's model reproduces those of Adam Smith, the early Marx, Henri Pirenne, and Paul Sweezy, which Brenner has consistently criticized. They too, he argues, tend to assume the existence of capitalism in order to explain its coming into being. Roemer would be subject to the same criticisms levelled by Brenner against what he calls 'Smithian Marxists', because, on the rational choice reasoning to which Roemer is committed, he simply cannot get from feudalism to capitalism without already assuming capitalist structures and capitalist motivations. The relations of capitalism and the associated compulsions of capital accumulation, the specific logic of capitalism and its systemic imperatives, can in no way be deduced simply from the unequal distribution of 'alienable assets' which for Roemer constitutes the kernel of capitalism already existing in feudalism. (Here, the inadequacy of Roemer's model of exploitation—defined in terms of inequality or relative advantage—becomes most starkly obvious, since whatever value it may have in explicating the injustices of exploitation, it is completely incapable of apprehending capitalism as a particular system of social production, appropriation and accumulation.) Nor can the relations and imperatives of capitalism be deduced from the mere existence of towns, on the assumption

---

<sup>44</sup> Brenner, 'Bourgeois Revolution', p. 293.

<sup>45</sup> Brenner's contribution to the collection on *Analytical Marxism* edited by Roemer, which presents his account of the transition in a schematic form, argues that the conventional explanation of the development of capitalism, based largely on Adam Smith, assumes precisely the extraordinary phenomenon that needs to be explained, that property relations must be understood as 'relations of reproduction'; that pre-capitalist economies have their own logic and 'solidity', which are in effect denied by the conventional view, that capitalist development is a more historically limited and specific occurrence than is allowed by theories which attribute it to some universal law of technical progress, and that the history of the transition cannot be explained by assuming that there is a necessary correspondence between the self-interested actions of individual actors and the requirements of economic growth. In these respects, his argument runs directly counter to Roemer's basic assumptions, and to Cohen's technological determinism. It is worth adding that his schematic argument in this volume, in contrast to the contributions of Rational Choice Marxists, is grounded in historical work and is based on the premise that the work of historical *explanation* needed to be done in advance of the analytic *presentation*.

—unwarranted both logically and historically—that towns are by nature capitalist.

Brenner's approach represents a challenge to the RCM model at every level of analysis, from the most specifically empirical to the abstractly theoretical. Empirically, Brenner's history of capitalist development puts in question nearly every point in Roemer's imaginary scenario. Capitalism does not, in his account, simply exist, miraculously, 'alongside' the feudal economy, nor is it here a product of mercantile interests in the towns competing with feudal interests in the countryside. Direct producers do not join the capitalist economy by fleeing the countryside to become artisans or proletarians. The development of capitalism is rather a process set in train by the transformation of agrarian relations themselves, in particular conditions which have little to do with some exogenous expansion of trade. Indeed, this account (like others in the famous 'Transition debate'<sup>46</sup>) begins by casting doubt on the inherent antagonism of markets and trade to the feudal order. It is not capitalism or the market as an 'option' or *opportunity* which Brenner seeks to explain, but the emergence of capitalism and the capitalist market as an *imperative*. His is a history of the very special conditions in which direct producers in the countryside were subjected to market imperatives, rather than the emergence of 'options' for direct producers, opportunities offered them by trading interests in the towns.

More generally, the facts of the case as presented by Brenner run counter to Roemer's 'deep cause' (and Cohen's technological determinism)—as Roemer himself is apparently aware—by indicating that there is no historical necessity for less productive 'economic structures' to be followed by more productive ones and by stressing the historical specificity of the conditions in which the process of 'self-sustaining' growth was first established. Roemer's response to this challenge, readers may recall, is simply that capitalism did eventually spread to other parts of Europe, even if it first emerged in England, so that Brenner's evidence does not contradict Cohen's version of historical materialism, with its universal law of technological determinism. This response depends on a cavalier treatment of historical time (who cares about 'a few centuries?'), as Carling has observed, and a similar treatment of geographical space (who cares about the world beyond Europe—or indeed beyond western Europe?). More fundamentally, it depends on treating the historically specific process of capitalist expansion, *a priori*, as a transhistorical law of nature.

When Roemer invokes the universality of capitalist development, at least its eventual spread to other parts of Europe, this is no reply to Brenner. It is, again, a begging of the question. The whole point of Brenner's argument is to avoid simply taking for granted the universal development of capitalism by subsuming it under some universal law of historical change, and instead to explain how historically

---

<sup>46</sup> Rodney Hilton, *The Transition Debate*, Verso, London, 1976. See also Hilton, 'Towns in English Feudal Society', in *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History*, London 1985.

specific conditions produced capitalism's unique drive and its unique capacity for expansion and universalization, from historically specific origins. The very least that can be said about the inadequacy of Roemer's response is that the universality of capitalism can be deployed as evidence for Brenner's account just as easily as for Cohen's. Brenner's has the advantage of resting on a wealth of historical evidence and of not assuming the very thing that needs to be explained.

### What Is a Theory of History?

What is at stake here is not, however, only Brenner's empirical challenge to Roemer-Cohen's theory of history. Brenner's explanation of capitalist development as emerging out of feudal relations themselves, instead of 'alongside' them, plays havoc with the very foundations of the RCM model. Historical change is generated in his account by processes within existing social relations, and not by the 'choice' of some other, exogenous or co-existing, 'option'. Certainly lords and peasants make 'rational choices' (what serious historian would deny this?), but those choices occur within the existing relations. Indeed, they are aimed not at attaining the next, more attractive, historical stage (which the parties involved cannot, in any case, anticipate) but at the *reproduction* of existing conditions.

Such an account implies something more than individuals with (fixed and static) 'resources' or 'endowments' plus 'rationality' (with magically available options). It implies a whole historically constituted and dynamic network of structured relations—between lord and peasant, between each and his community, between class and state—always in process; and it cannot beg the question of historical origins. Brenner's contribution to 'analytic Marxism' (explicitly stated in the volume of that name edited by Roemer) is to break the link which ties the game-theoretic model to the theory of history: he undermines the presupposition that there is a direct correspondence between the self-interested actions of rational economic actors and the requirements of technical progress or economic growth. If there is anything distinctive in RCM, if it is more than just an 'analytic' mode of presentation or even a very general acknowledgement that people make history by making choices which may have unintended consequences (if, for example, RCM is serious about constructing its game-theoretic universe out of just individual resources plus rationality) then Brenner's history represents a challenge to its very first methodological premises.

It should already be evident that Brenner's approach also challenges the whole notion of historical theory as a general account of universal laws which move in a pre-determined direction. Not only does he question the historical-materialist credentials of such a theory by attributing it to an undeveloped phase of Marx's work, still uncritically bound to classical bourgeois thought; but his whole historical project testifies to a view that a theory of history subsuming the entire developmental process from classical antiquity to capitalism (let alone the whole of world history) under one universal and essentially unidirectional law of motion, would need to be so general as to be

vacuous. How useful, after all, is a 'theory' of technological progress which claims to be equally compatible with moments of rapid technical improvement and long epochs of stagnation or 'petrification'?<sup>47</sup>

To say this is not to accept Carling's view that Brenner has empirical evidence but not a theory of history. It is instead to suggest that there may be other conceptions of theory, and indeed that the most distinctive feature of historical materialism—that which distinguishes it most radically, in form as well as substance, from conventional bourgeois theories of progress—is not its adherence to a general law of technological determinism. It is, rather, a focus (such as that which characterizes the most complete and systematic of Marx's own works, his actual practice in the critique of political economy and the analysis of capitalism) on the specificity of every mode of production, its endogenous logic of process, its own 'laws of motion', its characteristic crises—to use Brenner's formula, its own rules of reproduction.

This is not simply a matter of distinguishing, as Carling does, between a 'general theory' of history and a 'special' theory of capitalism. It is rather a different (and general) theory of history of which the theory of capitalism, with its specific laws of motion, is the prime example. While Cohen's 'general theory' takes the form of retrospective or even teleological predictions, with the benefit of hindsight, with such a degree of generality that no empirical evidence could possibly falsify it, Brenner's theory demands empirical specification which does not assume a predetermined outcome. But if the mark of a theory is the existence of 'fixed points' which remain constant throughout its specific applications, there are more than enough fixed points in Brenner's account—in particular, the principle that at the foundation of every social form there are property relations whose conditions of reproduction structure social and historical processes.

### Cohen plus Roemer?

Does this mean that 'Cohen plus Roemer' works better? There are, of course, problems here too, not the least of which is that Cohen's account of technological determinism, with its emphasis on 'functional explanation', seems to run counter to all the RCM strictures against 'methodological collectivism'. And yet, on second thoughts, the attraction which Cohen exerts upon Roemer and other RCMists may be understandable and not at all inconsistent, or at least it is entirely consistent with the irreducible contradiction at the heart of RCM.

---

<sup>47</sup> It was Marx himself who insisted that capitalism is unique in its drive to revolutionize productive forces, while other modes of production have tended to conserve existing forces, and that 'petrification' may have been the rule rather than the exception. See, for example, *Capital* I, Moscow 1971, pp. 436–7. A similar view appears even in the *Communist Manifesto*, which in other respects still adheres to the early, uncritical theory of history.

I have criticized Cohen's technological determinism elsewhere, in 'The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism', *NLR* 127, pp. 70–74, and in a more general discussion of technological determinism in 'Marxism and the Course of History', *NLR* 149, pp. 95–107.



RCM requires that, if functional explanations are invoked, a mechanism must be found to account for how the 'functional' effect is produced. Cohen's functional explanation of the development of productive forces rests on a particular theory of human nature which purports to supply the necessary mechanism: given a rationality which involves a disposition to seize the means of satisfying compelling wants, and a kind and degree of intelligence which permits them to improve their situation, in conditions of scarcity, human beings will generally seek and/or adopt whatever means are available to curtail labour, which is inherently unpleasant to them (never mind evidence to the contrary, such as that provided by Brenner). It is this transhistorical rationality, and the impulse to improve productive forces which it entails, that underlies the functional argument for the primacy of productive forces.

Because of RCM's own static model of 'property relations', the first requirement in an RCM-compatible theory of history is that the 'motor' must come from outside any given system of property or exploitation. In other words, it is in the nature of the RCM model that, in order to account for historical process, it requires a *deus ex machina*. Traditionally the most popular 'external' forces have been trade (markets enlarging and contracting, with trade routes opening and closing) and/or technical progress, both conceived as exogenous to the systems being transformed, either in the sense that they are determined by alien intrusions such as barbarian invasions, or in the sense that they operate according to some universal natural law (progress, the natural development of the human mind, or perhaps, more scientifically, demographic cycles...). RCM, however, has the special requirement that the explanation must be reduced to motivations which can be attributed to the rationality of individual human beings. A particular kind of transhistorical rationality, which can serve as the common denominator among all the various systems of property and exploitation, and can supply the mechanism for moving from one to the next, in effect containing the whole of history within it, seems tailor-made for the purpose. To put it another way, if historical motion can be explained only by presupposing each successive historical stage as an option or motivation already available in the preceding one, then it helps to have some exogenous cause for its availability. An RCM-compatible theory of history requires also that the 'rational choice' model of exploitation be left intact, and this means that production *relations*, which are not so much the *conditions* of rational choice as its product, can play no immediate part in setting off the dynamic of change. What is needed is a theory of history which, as it were, runs parallel to the analytic model without impinging upon or challenging its constitutive analytic fiction, which presents the exploitative 'relation' as an agreement between rational agents.

Cohen, unlike Brenner, permits RCM to maintain its static model and does not place upon it the intolerable strain of motivating historical change from within specific property relations, without the aid of exogenous forces or 'feasible alternatives' which appear by spontaneous generation, in the form of already existing options, motivations or 'assets'. Thus RCM, a theory ostensibly devoted to rescuing human

agency from structural determinisms, is forced to readmit a fairly old-fashioned historical determinism through the back door, while retaining the fiction of 'rational choice' at another, ahistorical level of analysis.

On balance, Roemer appears to be right in thinking that an alliance with Cohen is a safer bet than collaboration with Brenner. At the same time, since neither match is unproblematic, it might be more precise to say that Roemer's theory of class and exploitation is uncongenial to *any* explanation of history. Anyone who believes that a vacuously general theory is little better than no theory at all in historical explanation, might be inclined to think that it is just here, in its fundamentally ahistorical character and in its hostility to historical specificity, that RCM has most in common with Cohen's technological determinism.

### Elster on Marx and History

Elster's approach to technological determinism presents problems of its own. He is more inclined than Roemer to demand from Cohen a specific account—in methodological-individualist terms—of the mechanisms by which the long-term 'functional' effect of technological progress is achieved, and in this sense significantly qualifies his adherence to the 'general theory' and its reliance on functional explanation. He also questions the extent to which Marx himself consistently adhered to the general theory. On this point, Elster's principal concern is to demonstrate that Marx's theory of history is inherently inconsistent; and his argument centres on one important insight, namely that in Marx's own accounts of historical transitions, the development of productive forces plays little role as the primary motor.

This observation is both true and significant. Although the 'general theory' appears in various (though not many) aphoristic formulae in Marx's work, it is not generally deployed in his systematic attempts at historical explanation. So, for example, his most comprehensive accounts of pre-capitalist societies in the *Grundrisse* and of the historical transition to capitalism—especially in the section on 'Primitive Accumulation' in *Capital*—do not invoke the development of productive forces as the motivating impulse of historical change, and indeed are based on the premise that what needs to be explained is precisely the *origin* of capitalism's distinctive drive to improve the forces of production. Here, in the critique of political economy which formed the core of his life's work, Marx laid the foundation for a different kind of 'general' theory—the foundation on which Brenner, for instance, has constructed his own account of history. But Elster is not interested in this theoretical alternative, if he even recognizes it as such (as distinct from a 'special' theory of capitalism). He is interested only in demonstrating the incompatibility between Marx's adherence to the primacy of productive forces and his analysis of capitalism, a contradiction between the general theory of history as the development of productive forces and the view that the maximization of technological development is specific to capitalism.

There is no doubt that Marx never bothered to resolve the inconsistencies between his aphorisms about the forces of production and his insistence on the specificity of capitalism. It needs to be said, however, that even in the context of the 'general theory' (if such it is), there is room for a specifically capitalist dynamic. The critical issue for Marx was always the *specific compulsion* of capitalism to revolutionize the forces of production, which differs from any more general tendency to improve productive forces that may be ascribed to history as a whole. In that sense, it was possible for him consistently to hold both the view that history displays a general tendency to improve the forces of production and the view that capitalism had a special need and capacity to revolutionize productive forces. Beginning early in his career, Marx never deviated from the view that the capitalist drive is specific and unprecedented and that, whatever progressive tendencies may be generally observable in history, the specific logic of capitalism and its specific compulsion to improve the productivity of labour by technical means are not reducible to these general tendencies. They require a specific explanation. He also made it very clear that the capitalist impulse to improve the productivity of labour is quite distinct from, and often in opposition to, any general human inclination to curtail labour. The capitalist impulse is to *increase the portion of unpaid labour*. He devoted much of his life's work to explaining this specifically capitalist dynamic.

Marx's critique of political economy, the core of his mature work, proceeds precisely by way of differentiating himself from those who take for granted and universalize the logic and dynamic of capitalism without acknowledging the historical specificity of its 'laws' or seeking to uncover what produces them. Marx, unlike the classical political economists, and indeed a host of other ideologues of 'progress' and 'commercial society', did not assume that the 'progress' embodied in modern society was simply the outcome of a drive inherent in human nature or natural law, but insisted on the specificity of the capitalist demand for productivity and the need to find an explanation for it. It was Marx's identification of that specific dynamic which made it possible even to raise the question of the 'transition' to capitalism, to seek an explanation of how that dynamic was set in train, something which remained impossible as long as people assumed the very forces that needed to be explained. Marx himself never produced a systematic account of the historical process of transition, and his discussions of pre-capitalist modes of production were never more than retrospective analyses, part of a strategy to explicate the workings of capitalism and emphasize the historicity of its laws and categories. But he took the qualitative leap that was required to make an explanation of the transition possible, and he thereby established a basis for a general theory of history which would also treat other modes of production on their own specific terms.

### History or Teleology?

It is especially ironic that the strategy adopted by Marx to highlight the specificity of capitalism is mistaken by Elster for a *teleological* account of history. This misunderstanding by itself tells us something

important about Elster's conception of what counts as a theory of history and its essential affinity to 'Roemer-plus-Cohen'. In a particularly significant passage, Elster cites Marx's famous aphorism that 'Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape', from the *Grundrisse*, as a statement of his 'teleological stance'—which is, according to Elster, 'closely related to the propensity for functional explanation. . . .'<sup>48</sup> Elster compounds the misunderstanding by interpreting this aphorism to apply to the 'teleological' relationship between communism and capitalism, as it does to the relationship between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production. Although capitalism can, of course, be analysed from the standpoint of socialism—that is, by identifying the potentiality within capitalism for a socialist transformation—the analogy suggested by Elster is an imperfect one. Capitalism can provide the 'key' to pre-capitalist society, in the sense here intended, only because it actually exists and because it has given rise to its own historically constituted categories, whose historical specificity Marx is trying to demonstrate by *critically* applying them to pre-capitalist forms. That is precisely the meaning of his *critique* of political economy. The point is not that capitalism is *prefigured* in pre-capitalist forms but on the contrary that capitalism represents a historically specific *transformation*. Marx adopts this paradoxical strategy precisely in order to counter 'those economists who smudge over all historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society'<sup>49</sup>—that is, precisely against what might be called the teleological tendencies of classical political economy, for which 'bourgeois relations' are the natural and universal order of things, the destination of progress already present in all earlier stages of history. To the extent that Marx's point of departure is a refusal to incorporate capitalism into the historical process which produced it, and especially with a theory of history in which every mode of production is propelled by its own distinctive laws of motion, his characteristic procedure is exactly the reverse of teleological or even functional explanation.

Although a teleological account of history represents the most serious violation of methodological individualism, RCM has a tendency to incorporate the destination of history into its very beginnings—a teleological procedure if ever there was one. On the one hand, RCM can give no account of history but must begin afresh with every social form, an already given and static 'property relation' represented in the person of the rational individual whose 'endowments' and 'relational properties' come from nowhere and are going nowhere; on the other hand, it is drawn to theories of history in which the end is already given in the beginning—as forms of exploitation coexisting until they successively fall away, or as a transhistorical drive for technological development, requiring only 'elimination' or the removal of impediments to come to the fore. In both cases, the question of *historical processes* is begged. Perhaps, then, it is simply the idea of *process* that sticks in the RCM throat, and the problem—for someone like Elster—is not that conventional Marxism is *teleological* but that it is *historical*, a distinction which may not be altogether clear in the RCM framework.

<sup>48</sup> Elster, p. 54.

<sup>49</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 105.

At worst, then, the RCM model as a guide to history is positively misleading. At best, it can add little to what Marxism can achieve by other less precious and circuitous means. And since the context in which 'rational choices' are made must always be specified first (and the model cannot help us to arrive at that specification), if the model is to be used at all in the explanation of social and historical processes, then all the real work—the historical and structural analysis—needs to be done before the model can be inserted. In such a case, the model is, again, largely rhetorical or persuasive. If that is so, we really have to ask whether the game is worth the candle. What rational being would choose RCM if the pay-off is so incommensurate with the effort?

#### 4. The Moral Argument

We are left with the claims of RCM as a mode of moral argumentation. If it can make good Roemer's claim that 'the game-theoretic formulation is superior [to conventional Marxism and its 'surplus labour' theory—EMW] in that it makes explicit what ethical presumption lies behind the Marxian theory of exploitation', if it can thereby enhance the ideological arsenal of socialism by securing the case for its moral superiority to capitalism, then a useful purpose will no doubt have been served. And if this is RCM's principal project, we may be inclined to conclude that its explanatory weakness is not such a serious shortcoming after all. It would certainly fill a gap in socialist thought which, among other things, has put Marxism on the defensive against the charge that the explicit disavowal of ethical considerations in the interests of 'scientific socialism' has disarmed it in the face of deformations such as Stalinism. This vacuum in Marxist argumentation has been more acutely felt as growing disappointment with revolutions in the East and their absence in the West have sapped an older confidence in the historical tendency toward, if not the inevitability of, socialism, which as a historical necessity could, apparently, dispense with an ethical justification.

It is, however, unlikely that such considerations have weighed very heavily with Rational Choice Marxists. They have generally shown little interest in socialist history, in its international dimension, and have been almost exclusively preoccupied with interlocutors on the academic Right. What seems to have concentrated their minds on ethical questions is the rise, since the 1970s, of an increasingly aggressive and confident intellectual Right. For the first time in recent memory, the Right has marshalled its intellectual forces, inside and outside the academy, to demonstrate that capitalism is materially and morally better than socialism, both more efficient and more free.

But if RCM is principally designed to meet the philosophical challenge from the academic-intellectual Right, it has entered the battle with (at least) one hand tied behind its back. This paradigm is singularly ill-designed to give us a sense of capitalist accumulation as a ruthless world process which inevitably generates economic catastrophes outside the privileged North, as well as regular crises within it, not to mention the threat of nuclear or ecological destruction for the world altogether. Indeed, the RCM corpus generally leaves the impression of

a very limited mental universe, confined within an opulent Northern capitalism, and even there constricted by a remarkable insensitivity to the irrationalities and destructive effects of capitalist accumulation. The RCM case for socialism is generally predicated on a relatively benign capitalism—a capitalism which is particularly effective in satisfying material interests (always narrowly conceived in terms of 'consumer bundles'). Even Roemer, who is committed to the view that capitalism is in principle anarchic and inefficient, is constrained by his overriding methodological commitment to the abstract models of conventional economics. He presents his indictment of capitalist inefficiency not by exposing the realities of its wasteful destructiveness but, indirectly, by mildly acknowledging, in very general and abstract terms, that some of the assumptions of equilibrium theory (a theory which he nevertheless regards as 'one of the great contributions to social scientific method of the past century') may not apply in real capitalist economies.<sup>30</sup> Other RCMists are evidently not prepared to concede even this much to the critique of capitalism, suggesting at best that the superior efficiency of capitalism may have to be sacrificed in the interests of some higher commitment—perhaps to democracy and collective decision-making.<sup>31</sup> Such a restricted analysis of capitalism not only deprives the socialist project of any historical foundation but weakens the moral case against capitalism.

RCM leaves little ground for socialist struggle against capitalism, nor does it seem to matter very much. On the one hand, there being little historical or material foundation for the socialist project as an outcome of real conflicts and struggles generated by capitalism, that project has been reduced to a largely academic moral disputation, a rhetorical exercise designed to *persuade*. On the other hand, the terrain of moral contest has itself been severely restricted by a sanguine view of capitalism that narrows the ground on which socialism can claim superiority. It is, in any case, a simple matter of preference, and the choice appears to be of little moment.

It is not surprising, given the contingency and inconsequentiality of the choice between capitalism and socialism, that RCM tends to be obsessed with mathematical formulae and narrowly formalistic questions which have little connection with the real and urgent moral-political problems confronting humanity and the socialist movement today. Its constricted conception of the issues, and its casuistic formalism shaped to the narrow standards of a very particular specialized audience, are unlikely to produce anything particularly useful or politically effective. Still, it is perhaps early days and something more substantial may yet emerge from RCM efforts to construct a normative

---

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Roemer, *From To Law*, p. 151. The weakness of the barrier erected by RCM against right-wing triumphalism is illustrated by John Gray's review of *From To Law* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 February–2 March 1989. Roemer is here castigated for adopting the worst features of neo-classical economics, its complete abstraction and detachment from the real world of market processes—though in Gray's account, of course, the real world triumphantly vindicates capitalism and decisively demonstrates the inferiority of socialism. Nothing in Roemer's argument equips him to withstand this onslaught.

<sup>31</sup> Przeworski, pp. 237–8.

socialist theory. For the moment, if we are not simply to dismiss the moral argument out of hand as largely irrelevant to the realities of contemporary capitalism and the conditions of socialist struggle, we need at least to be persuaded that the moral theory, which in its most developed Roemerian form purports to reveal the exploitative foundations of capitalism, adds something to our understanding of capitalist exploitation, or rather, that it adds more than it subtracts.

### Moral Argument v. Explanation?

Let us for the sake of argument accept that Roemer has indeed successfully revealed the moral principle on the basis of which capitalism stands condemned (Carling's gloss on Roemer on pp. 41-2 of his first article may be taken as the most sympathetic account of the argument); and we can overlook the doubts cast by Elster on the usefulness of the concept of exploitation as a tool 'for a more fine-grained investigation into moral theory'.<sup>32</sup> The concern here will be with the consequences of the theory when it is given the benefit of the doubt. Here, Elster makes a striking point. He suggests that the very conceptual devices which constitute RCM as a moral-rhetorical strategy disable it as a mode of explanation.

The importance of exploitation in Marxism is twofold. First, the presence of exploitation in a society provides the outside observer with a ground for normative criticism. Exploitation is wrong; exploiters are morally condemnable; a society that tolerates or generates exploitation ought to be abolished. Secondly, exploitation can provide the exploited with a ground for taking individual or collective action against the system, and hence enters into the explanation of such action. When constructing a more elaborate theory of exploitation, one may face the problem that the normatively relevant concept is one that does not have much explanatory significance.<sup>33</sup>

Elaborating on this point later in the book, Elster writes:

the immediate transfer of surplus-value is not an important notion from the moral point of view. . . . Hence the moral and the explanatory aspects of Marxism diverge rather sharply at this point. It would have been theoretically satisfactory to argue that the grounds on which capitalism is to be condemned are also those that will motivate the struggle to abolish it. Marx, however, does not succeed in showing that this connection holds.<sup>34</sup>

Elster's principal concern has to do with the role of class struggle in the socialist project: if the moral evil of capitalism lies in its unequal distribution of the relevant 'resources', while conflict and struggle are generated by a transfer of surplus which has no place in the moral argument, then the moral condemnation of capitalism has little to do with the motivations for struggles against it.

It needs to be said, first, that 'classical' Marxism never did make this

---

<sup>32</sup> Elster, p. 229.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

kind of connection, in the form suggested by Elster. Certainly it is a distinctive characteristic of Marxism to insist on an organic connection between theory and practice; but this does not take the form of claiming that the 'scientific' analysis of capitalism can also yield a moral judgement which will motivate the revolutionary transformation. The argument is rather that the explanatory theory which exposes the workings of capitalism also expresses the self-emancipatory project of the working class by revealing the convergence of its interests and capacities with the conditions of a socialist transformation made possible by capitalism. This is not to deny Marx's moral condemnation of capitalism; but it is precisely because he deliberately avoided the kind of connection suggested by Elster that there has been so much controversy about the very existence of a moral dimension in Marx's account of capitalism.<sup>25</sup>

The force of Elster's argument, however, does not derive from the claim that Roemer has broken a link on which the coherence of classical Marxism depended. It lies rather in the suggestion that Roemer's moral argument itself has no explanatory power, and even that there is a contradiction between the requirements of the moral argument and the explanatory capacity of Marxist theory. Elster diverges from Roemer in a way which reveals an important truth about the Roemerian theory and about RCM generally, a truth which Roemer often hides from himself by stressing the automaticity of the links connecting the unequal distribution of assets (the moment of exploitation) to the generation of classes and in turn to the necessity of the struggle for socialism. Elster recognizes that the connections have been severed—not just modified in their degree of necessity but cleanly severed—by the exclusion of the transfer of surplus labour from the theory of exploitation. This affects not only our understanding of the revolutionary agency which will bring about socialism but also the whole Marxist explanation of history.

Elster's answer, however, is not to reintroduce the transfer of surplus labour into the original account of exploitation, but rather to isolate the definition of exploitation as a normative concept while displacing the transfer of surplus labour to a different, explanatory plane. He suggests that without the 'surplus labour theory' there is much that Roemer cannot explain—in particular, about social conflict; but the conclusion he draws from this is simply that a theory of exploitation which might serve to establish a normative concept must be essentially devoid of explanatory power.

By itself, the separation of normative and explanatory arguments need not be disabling. It can be a legitimate exercise to construct a moral argument at an angle different from that required by, say, historical explanation. But problems do arise when there are outright contradictions, or when the premises of the moral argument require us to believe things which flout historical evidence or cloud our historical

---

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent account of the debate surrounding these issues, and a persuasive argument that Marx himself did, if involuntarily, have a concept of justice, see Norman Geras, 'The Controversy About Marx and Justice', *NLS* 150, March/April 1985, pp. 47–85.



vision. The problems here do not flow simply from the decoupling of the moral and explanatory aspects of Marxism. The real difficulties lie in the *explanatory* implications of the moral argument itself—or rather, the explanatory weakness of RCM is traceable to the very first step in its moral argument, the point at which the moment of surplus-transfer was detached from the unequal distribution of assets. For Roemer, the requirements of the moral theory were not—yet—visibly distinct from those of the explanatory model because both the moral and the causal aspects of exploitation had their origins in inequality and the apparent automaticity of its consequences. For Elster, the necessary consequence of the moral argument, which required isolating the moment of injustice by situating it in the original unequal distribution, is that moral and explanatory theories had to diverge.

But from then on—and this is the critical point—the separation remains in place not only for the analytic purpose of isolating the normative moment but as an intrinsic element in the explanatory model. In order to make his moral argument about exploitation without resorting to the labour theory of value, Roemer jettisons the whole apparatus which renders explanation possible, and thereafter seeks to reconstruct Marxist theory upon this hollow foundation. His vacuous account of history is the most notable result. Whether the fateful step was taken in order to meet the needs of an analytic theory of justice, or in order to satisfy the requirements of a game-theoretic explanatory model, or both together, the effects are the same. Either way, the theory of exploitation entails breaking the connections among the various ‘moments’ of capital—production, distribution, exchange, consumption—and destroying any conception of capitalism as a *process*, in which these analytically distinct moments are dynamically united. In other words, there has been a complete reversal of the theoretical advances which Marx so painstakingly laboured to establish in his critique of political economy. That this represents progress in our understanding of capitalism, and not a regression to the worst simplifications of pre-Marxist political economy, remains to be demonstrated.

#### Przeworski on Roemer: Exploitation and Class Struggle

Przeworski too recognizes the problem in Roemer’s argument—yet it is in his own attempt to find a solution that the weaknesses in the RCM paradigm are most starkly revealed. Roemer’s definition of exploitation, writes Przeworski, is superior to the ‘surplus value’ definition ‘not because it provides a better causal explanation’ but because it ‘makes clear “the ethical imperatives” of Marxian theory’.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, he argues, the explanatory power of Roemer’s theory is so weak that it ‘does not establish any logical correspondence between exploitation and class struggle, that no such correspondence is here to establish, and that his historical assertions [about the necessity of the connections between inequality and exploitation, and between

---

<sup>36</sup> Przeworski, p. 226.

exploitation and class struggle—BMW] are entirely rhetorical.<sup>57</sup> There is, for Przeworski, no 'tight correspondence' of the kind proposed by Roemer between the original distribution of assets and its consequences in the inequality of income. The connection between the two is mediated and variable, subject, for example, to struggles between capital and labour at the point of production. Roemer simply factors out such mediations and thereby assumes out of existence 'the problem of extracting labour out of labour-power'.<sup>58</sup> (Przeworski might have added that the RCM model in general does not accommodate the *open-endedness*, the *incompleteness* of the capitalist labour contract but proceeds as if the exchange between capital and labour were between two known quantities, a wage in exchange for a given service or product.) The automaticity of Roemer's equation, Przeworski argues, does not allow, among other things, for the possibility that people will work more intensively for themselves than for others, and that the income of capitalists will depend on their success in extracting surplus labour from their reluctant workers. The problem, suggests Przeworski, is that Roemer has simply transported the assumptions of his original model of exploitation, where no exchange of labour takes place and where there is no problem of *extracting* labour, to an exploitative relation where there *is* a labour exchange and where the original assumptions are therefore no longer appropriate.

The rigid necessity of the connections in Roemer's formula, between the distribution of assets and the distribution of income, leaves no logical place, argues Przeworski, for class struggle *within* a mode of production but only in the transition from one mode to another. This arbitrary automaticity allows Roemer to assume that no significant redistribution of wealth is possible under capitalism, given its original distribution of assets, and that workers are obliged to struggle for socialism if they want to improve their material conditions. Przeworski sets out to correct Roemer's formulation in order to make room for class struggle within capitalism, to reconnect exploitation with class struggle and the process of capital accumulation, and above all to lay the foundation of an argument for socialism which does not depend on its presumed superiority in satisfying workers' material interests.

There are some perceptive and telling arguments here, but it turns out that Przeworski is himself handicapped from the start by his own adherence to the RCM model. Indeed, he adheres to it in some respects more rigidly than does Roemer. The trouble with Roemer, apparently, is that he is not *enough* of a game-theorist, and that he has not introduced enough choice or contingency into the connection between exploitation and class struggle. But Przeworski's faithfulness to the game-theoretical model leaves him with problems of his own. To Roemer's rigid necessities, he can reply only with almost unlimited contingencies. Since for the purposes of the rational-choice model capitalism exists only as a 'game' between consenting adults, a game in which the stakes are no more compelling than a desire for 'optimization',

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

there is no 'logical place' in his argument for capitalism as a compulsive and coercive system, a ruthless logic of process.

There is little room, first, for the compulsions which operate on capital, the *imperatives* of accumulation and self-expansion. We no longer have any notion of how to explain the relation between the 'distribution of assets' and the *need* for accumulation, the *necessity* of extracting surplus at the point of production and the contradictions and conflicts this necessarily occasions. All we have is a game in which capitalists have 'assets' which, if they wish, they can use to increase their wealth by extracting surplus from workers, as long as they succeed in overcoming whatever power of resistance the workers may have.

Second, there is little room for the fundamental coercion imposed on the worker from the beginning, before the 'moment' of labour-extraction and independent of the balance of power between any particular capitalist and any particular group of workers. This is the compulsion inherent in the initial disposition of property relations which systematically obliges some people to forfeit surplus labour to others simply in order to gain access to the means of labour itself.

If Roemer's model is inadequate because of its failure to acknowledge the problem of extracting labour from labour-power, Przeworski's is inadequate because of its failure to appreciate the coercive pre-suppositions of surplus extraction. If Roemer's paradigm suffers from an inability to allow that people may work harder for themselves than for others, Przeworski's is weakened by an inability to acknowledge the strength of the compulsion to intensify labour in cases where the obligation to labour for others is the pre-condition of access to the means of labour. If Roemer transports assumptions from one model to another where they do not apply, from an exploitative relation without a labour exchange to one in which there is such an exchange, an analogous transportation of assumptions occurs in Przeworski's model: exploitative relations where access to the means of survival is conditional on the transfer of surplus labour are here analysed on the assumptions of a model where no such condition exists. If the explanatory weakness of Roemer's model lies in its presumption of necessity, Przeworski's fails because of its insistence on contingency.

In the guise of establishing connections between exploitation, class struggle and capital accumulation (connections which he says are missing in Marx as well as Roemer), Przeworski has effectively dissolved the systemic connections and compulsions long ago demonstrated by Marx. Capitalism appears at best as an inert 'constraint' on individual choices, and the constraint seems very weak, very permissive in the latitude of choices it allows. Przeworski's argument is, in fact, based in large part on the assumption that a 'major redistribution of wealth endowments' is 'feasible' under capitalism, that class struggle can not only accelerate or retard accumulation but 'transform' it altogether while leaving the original distribution intact. This highly abstract proposition evinces an attitude to historical fact even

more off-hand than Roemer's.<sup>39</sup> It is perhaps a measure of the imperatives imposed by the rational-choice model that Przeworski ends by contradicting the very convictions concerning the implacability of capitalism, and the limited scope it permits to reform, upon which he bases his critique of social democracy.

In the end, Roemer's compulsive paradigm may be less misleading about the coercive realities of capitalism than is Przeworski's permissive model—though the latter is more logically consistent with RCM premises, its conception of choice and the weak compulsion of 'optimizing strategies'. Yet, though the consequences of Roemer's procedure are masked in his own work by his insistence on the absolute necessity of everything that follows from unequal distribution, it cannot be said that his RCM critics are wrong to claim that the tight connections in Roemer's equation are largely arbitrary and rhetorical; for once having made the first move in detaching the moments of capital, once having undermined the power of his theory to explain the coercive dynamic of capitalism, Roemer leaves no barriers to the conclusions drawn by Elster and Przeworski about the permissiveness of capitalism or the contingency of the relation between exploitation and class struggle.

### The Pay-Off

If the moral theory of RCM is weak on its own terms, as a moral

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 236–7. Przeworski here makes a truly extraordinary argument in support of his claims. To demonstrate that a 'major redistribution' within capitalism is historically no less feasible than socialism, he cites Henri Pirenne's suggestion that 'from the beginning of the Middle Ages to our time . . . for each period into which our economic history may be divided, there is a distinct and separate class of capitalists. In other words, the group of capitalists of a given epoch does not spring from the capitalist group of the preceding epoch. At every change of economic organization we find a breach of continuity . . . there are as many classes of capitalists as there are epochs in economic history.' (Henri Pirenne, 'The Stages of the Social History of Capitalism', *American Historical Review* xix, 1914, pp. 494–5.) Quite apart from the flippant attitude to history and historical evidence revealed by this perfunctory reference to one short, outdated, and highly debatable article, in order to support a very large historical claim, Przeworski's appeal to Pirenne on this point suggests a rather hazy understanding of capitalism. Pirenne is notoriously loose in his usage of 'capitalism' (though not uniquely so), and is generally inclined to imagine capitalism as already present in or coexisting with other social forms. The 'capitalist' is virtually anyone engaged in commerce for profit, any (urban) trader or merchant who, driven by the 'love of gain', uses movable property to amass more wealth, usually simply by buying cheap and selling dear. By these standards, the Renaissance Florentine merchant is a capitalist, but the English 'improving' landlord, or the capitalist tenant farmer of the famous English 'triad', extracting surplus value from a wage labourer, is not. In the article in question, Pirenne simply outlines a series of different merchant types who, he argues, successively came to the fore in European economic history. What prevents him from pushing capitalism even further back in history, to ancient Greece or Rome, is not any conviction about the historical specificity of capitalism, but simply the fact that the evidence is insufficient. There is no sense in his argument of a specifically capitalist dynamic, a logic of accumulation essentially different from the age-old inclination to buy cheap and sell dear. It is, in any case, hard to see what support his argument lends to Przeworski's contention about the feasibility of a major redistribution within capitalism, since Pirenne's argument has nothing to do with a redistribution between exploiting and exploited classes.

theory, because it lacks any purchase on the major moral and political issues of our time, it is doubly weak because it further undermines the power of the model to *explain* the conditions in which those issues must be contested. If RCM is to make good its claims as an improvement on conventional Marxism on *any* grounds, we have a right to expect a moral argument much more powerful than anything produced so far, not only to fill the gaps in the existing moral theory but to compensate for the explanatory sacrifices made on its behalf. The prospects, however, do not seem promising, for reasons that are inherent in the model itself. It seems unlikely that a moral theory capable of coming to grips with the realities of contemporary capitalism will come out of the constricted conception of the world and human experience contained in the RCM model. That model tends to be simplistically 'economistic' in its theoretical focus. Whatever their individual convictions about the complexity of human motivation, RCMists remain trapped in a theoretical paradigm which is blind to any motivating forces that cannot be reduced to the narrow terms of 'market-rationality', the calculation of 'utilities'. It often seems that RCM, like the crudest Benthamite utilitarianism, can acknowledge only those emotions or beliefs which can be rendered in potentially quantifiable or economic terms—so that, for example, Elster can write of guilt or shame as 'a utility fine', and something like parental care for children might appear as a 'transfer of utility'. The model is, after all, designed according to the specifications of bourgeois economics. In this respect, the RCM image of human nature has more in common with the 'economic man' of liberalism than with historical materialism. It is difficult to imagine that any profound moral insights will emerge from this banal and shrivelled *homo economicus*.

It is a telling comment on the weakness of Roemer's claim to provide the essential moral critique of capitalism that Przeworski, the most explicitly political of the three RCMists, feels compelled in the end to step outside the paradigm to justify a preference for socialism. Capitalism, he argues, can meet any challenge on the economic terrain marked out by Roemer. If socialism is preferable at all, it must be because it permits 'society as a whole to choose in a democratic way' how to allocate its resources.<sup>60</sup> The decisive moral criterion is not, then, equality but something like autonomy, or perhaps collective responsibility and community. Nothing in the RCM theory of exploitation has prepared us for this new moral standard.

But there is an even more curious anomaly. Roemer tells us that, according to historical materialism as he understands it, transformations of property relations are not caused by ideas about injustice and exploitation but by material conditions.<sup>61</sup> He does not dissociate himself from this proposition. Indeed, his adherence to technological

<sup>60</sup> Przeworski, p. 238.

<sup>61</sup> Roemer, *From Feudalism to Law*, p. 124. Roemer does not present this account of historical materialism as contradicting his view that 'it is perceptions and ideas about justice that are at the root of people's support for or opposition to an economic system' (p. 3), a view which is not inconsistent with a materialist account of historical transformations or even a materialist account of moral perceptions themselves.

determinism suggests a particularly deterministic interpretation of Marxism. What, then, is the point of reconstructing the whole of Marxist theory to satisfy the needs of an abstract moral argument? Why should RCM proceed as if moral persuasion were the principal agency of revolutionary change?

## 5. What Is the Politics of RCM?

The intellectual pay-off of Rational Choice Marxism appears to be strictly limited, and the costs may be far greater than the benefits. There remains the question of its political charge. A certain caution is required in the attempt to extract political implications from a theoretical tendency as abstract and formalistic as this. Its political significance may, in fact, lie precisely in a political amorphousness which makes it vulnerable to the vagaries of political fashion. One or two things can, however, be suggested about the political direction in which we are pointed by the theoretical assumptions of RCM.

If one were simply to list the principal features of the RCM model, the result would be something very like a caricature of Anglo-American liberalism as it has evolved since the seventeenth century: methodological individualism; 'analytic' method; ahistoricism (which is not necessarily incompatible with technological determinism or its functional equivalent and frequent corollary, a conception of history as the triumph of 'commercial society'); class conceived as income stratification; a preoccupation with market relations as distinct from production relations; an 'economic' model of human nature. This theoretical constellation could represent a rough sketch of the Anglophone liberal mind-set with its typical symbiosis of liberal ideology and British empiricism, in which a reductionist focus on human nature has been associated with a formalistic tradition of analytic philosophy. The striking resemblance between RCM and this liberal-empiricist ideal-type does not, of course, guarantee that all, or any, RCMists must subscribe to the relevant political doctrines; but the analogy is at least suggestive.

At the same time, there is another, at first glance opposing, tradition to which RCM has certain striking affinities—utopian socialism: a detachment of the ethical ideal of socialism from the historical conditions of its realization; a distributional theory of exploitation which locates the moment of injustice in the sphere of circulation and exchange; a 'one-sided' presentation of capitalism which abstracts the 'free' (if 'unfair') exchange between capital and labour from its 'pre-suppositions', thereby conjuring away the barriers between capitalism and socialism by implicitly constructing a continuum from capitalist to socialist 'freedom and equality'. This is a tradition about which Marx had a great deal to say, much of it uncannily prophetic of RCM, culminating in the following assessment:

It is forgotten, on the one side, that the *prerequisite* of exchange value, as the objective basis of the whole of the system of production, already in itself implies compulsion over the individual, since his immediate product is not a product for him, but only *becomes* such in the social process, and

since it *must* take on this general but nevertheless external form; and that the individual has an existence only as a producer of exchange value, hence that the whole negation of his natural existence is already implied, that he is therefore entirely determined by society; that this further presupposes a division of labour etc., in which the individual is already posited in relations other than that of mere *exchanger*, etc. That therefore this presupposition by no means arises either out of the individual's will or out of the immediate nature of the individual, but that it is, rather, *historical*, and posits the individual as already *determined* by society. It is forgotten, on the other side, that these higher forms, in which exchange, or the relations of production which realize themselves in it, are now posited, do not by any means stand still in this simple form where the highest distinction which occurs is a formal and hence irrelevant one. What is overlooked, finally, is that already the simple forms of exchange value and of money latently contain the opposition between labour and capital etc. Thus, what all this wisdom comes down to is the attempt to stick fast at the simplest economic relations, which, conceived by themselves, are pure abstractions; but these relationships are, in reality, mediated by the deepest antithesis, and represent only one side, in which the full expression of the antithesis is obscured.<sup>62</sup>

This is Marx's account of the capital relation as it appears to those 'foolish' French socialists 'who want to depict socialism as the realization of the ideals of *bourgeois* society'. And here perhaps is the crux of the matter. If the theoretical apparatus of RCM has any specific political implications, they too may lie in the *conflation* of *capitalism* and *socialism* which inheres in the very structure of the argument and which would account for its joint affinities to Anglo-American liberalism and French utopian socialism.

### Conflating Capitalism and Socialism

Carling's text on Rational Choice Marxism illustrates how the theoretical imperatives of RCM, and its rhetorical or ethical requirements in particular, exert a political pressure of their own. The essence of his argument has to do with how and why it might be *philosophically* legitimate to regard capitalism as *exploitative*, and hence unjust, despite the freedom and equality inherent in it. At first, this procedure appears to be a rhetorical strategy designed to meet defenders of capitalism on their own terrain. Carling suggests, however, that these rhetorical devices contain an important truth and that we should—as he would argue Roemer does—take seriously the claims to freedom and equality contained in their account of capitalist relations.

The extent to which Carling's argument here depends upon a 'one-sided' view of capitalism is nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in his suggestion that 'the market-place really is a free space: what is constitutionally unfree is the State-place, which upholds property, and the work-place, where those without property find it is in their best interest to labour for their daily bread.'<sup>63</sup> (Note the rather coy formulation according to which propertyless workers 'find it is in their

<sup>62</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 247–8.

<sup>63</sup> Carling, I, p. 36.

best interest' to labour for capital.) Carling thus completely misses the essence of capitalist unfreedom on two principal counts—by masking the necessity of the 'choice' between exploitation and survival rooted in the structure of capitalist social-property relations, *and* the ultimate compulsion of the capitalist market, the universal subjection of all human beings to its sovereignty summed up in Marx's 'fetishism of commodities'. He thereby evacuates the ground for any adequate statement of the socialist project. What he concludes from his analysis of capitalist freedom and equality is simply that we should regard socialism not as something qualitatively different from capitalism but rather as more of the same, more of the freedom and equality already inherent in capitalism.

In Carling's account of RCM there appears to be an explicit warrant for drawing political-strategic conclusions from the rhetorical merger of capitalism and socialism. But even short of that, the tendency to conflate capitalism and socialism, which is inherent in the RCM project, has political implications. If socialism is simply a quantitative improvement, an extension of capitalist freedom and equality, the passage from one to the other is likely to be relatively smooth and non-antagonistic—with all the implications this perception has for the marginalization of class politics. But even if the conflation is merely a rhetorical device, then at the very least it guarantees the vacuity of RCM as a guide to the strategy, because its moral-rhetorical value depends precisely on ignoring the critical barriers—such as class antagonisms—standing in the way of a smooth transition from one social form to the other.

There is, however, a significant paradox here—a paradox that belongs to the essence of every utopian socialism. On the one hand, the conflation of capitalism and socialism appears to suggest that the latter will grow directly, and more or less smoothly, out of the former. On the other hand, that same conflation is accompanied by, and indeed has as its principal corollary, a detachment of the socialist project from any historical foundation in the actual conditions of capitalism. Socialism grows out of capitalism not in the sense that the one creates the structural and historical conditions which make the other possible, the contradictions which place socialism on the historical agenda, and the agencies capable of carrying out the socialist project, but rather in the sense that socialism is a 'realization of capitalist ideals'. This juxtaposition of apparently contradictory ideas helps to account for the curious blend of optimism and pessimism which so often characterizes this kind of socialism: the transition to socialism will come about smoothly, without radical breaks or antagonistic encounters, but it is a very long way off—so long that it has receded into invisibility; hence the task of socialists is to 'humanize' capitalism. It may also help to explain the ambivalent quietism, even cynicism, of an Adam Przeworski, in which a hard-headed scepticism about the prospects of socialism exists in uneasy tandem with a trenchant critique of social democracy.

The RCM analysis of capitalism—its detachment of the 'moments' of capital, its theoretical annihilation of the capitalist *system* and capitalist



*process*, the effects of these procedures in dissociating class and class struggle from the logic of the capitalist process and rendering them contingent—severs the socialist project from its historical and political roots in the conditions of capitalism. The feasibility of the socialist project, and the possibility of mobilizing forces to carry it out, are no longer historical and political questions but simply rhetorical ones, having to do with the discursive conditions for persuading 'free and rational' individuals to 'choose' socialism—conditions that have little to do with the processes by which political movements are actually formed.

The 'tough-minded' scepticism about the feasibility of socialism expressed by RCMists like Adam Przeworski, in other words, has less to do with a hard-headed assessment of capitalist realities than with an abdication of the ground on which any such assessment could be made. If there is a difference between RCM and utopian socialism in these respects, it is not that the former provides a more effective analysis of the historical conditions for the realization of socialist ideals but rather that it offers a less effective, because more constricted and less passionate, moral vision.

### The Convergence of Post-Marxist Theories

There is, it is true, a range of political positions among exponents of the RCM 'paradigm', from Elster and (now) Przeworski on the right to Roemer further left. But if the political logic of the theoretical model is too weak to produce any single political outcome—apart from an inevitable strategic vacuity—the developmental trajectory of the trend as a whole is instructive. There has been a visible shift from RCM's original efforts to set Marxism on a more rigorous analytic footing, against attacks from the right, to what Elster has described as an 'unstated consensus' among its practitioners that leaves 'probably not a single tenet of classical Marxism' intact.<sup>64</sup> As 'classical Marxism' has given way to neo-classical economics, game theory, methodological individualism, and neo-contractarian philosophy, as RCM has set itself the task of 'making sense' (in Elster's phrase) of Marxist nonsense, so too the political commitment to socialist values has been tempered by a new 'realism' about the prospects of socialism. The cynical quietism evinced in the latest work of Adam Przeworski suggests the direction in which the logic of the trend is moving.

In some respects, this trajectory has much in common with another major theoretical tendency in contemporary Marxism, from Althusserianism to 'post-Marxism', which also began as an effort to reestablish 'rigour' in Marxist theory and has ended for many in a general repudiation of Marxism in theory and practice. In the latter case, the theoretical evolution of the trend is traceable to immediate historical coordinates, and especially to the life-cycle of the European Communist movement, or one of its significant off-shoots, as it wound its tortuous way from flirtations with Maoism through Eurocommunism and its current fatal disarray. RCM has not been similarly anchored to

---

<sup>64</sup> Elster, p. xiv

a political movement of this—or any other—kind, though it has been shaped by the general move to the right in its own geo-political backyard. But if its academic detachment has acted as a safeguard against some varieties of dogma, the absence of roots in the labour movement has also made it more susceptible to other dangers—not the least of which are the pressures of the academy, the attractions of current academic fashion, the professional requirements of an academic career, standards of judgment and a sense of proportion deriving not from the political arena but from the senior common room (or its American and/or Scandinavian equivalent), where the principal adversary is likely to be a professional neo-classical economist.

We may now be observing a curious convergence between two apparently antithetical tendencies, the super-rationalism of Rational Choice Marxism and post-structuralist irrationalism. RCM's abstractions, so typical of analytic philosophies which pride themselves on their empyreal detachment from the uncertain flux of historical process, paradoxically come together here with the irrationalist dissolution of history from the opposite direction. Both are impelled toward a politics detached from the anchor of history, as game-theoretic choices join post-modern contingency in a contradictory amalgam of political voluntarism, where rhetoric and discourse are the agencies of social change, and a cynical defeatism, where every radical programme of change is doomed to failure.

## Collets

### The Book People of the Left

#### **COLLETS INTERNATIONAL SHOP**

129-131 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0BG  
Telephone: [01] 734 0782/3

The very best of general books, especially British & foreign fiction. The broadest spectrum of books, journals & pamphlets on all aspects of politics, economics, social science & the labour and trade union movement. Russian & Slavonic literature, teaching & learning aids. Travel & guide-books from & about the USSR & Eastern Europe. Art books from the USSR. EFL & Open University textbooks. Third world, gay & feminist politics, ecology & peace publications. Classical records & sheet music from the USSR. Folk music dept. & songbooks. Political posters & badges.

#### **COLLETS PENGUIN BOOKSHOP**

84-86 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0BD. Tel: [01] 836 6303  
Most Penguins, Pelicans & Puffins in print. Secondhand science section. Reference, travel, & cookery books. The best of modern fiction.

#### **COLLETS CHINESE BOOKSHOP & GALLERY**

40 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PJ  
Tel: [01] 580 7538  
Books in Chinese & English from & about China. Chinese language aids & oriental art books. Traditional Chinese handicrafts & works of art; antiques, prints, jewellery, porcelain and embroideries. Chinese artists' materials.

**MAIL ORDERS WELCOME**

## Hillsborough, 15 April 1989: Some Personal Contemplations

When news of the Hillsborough disaster began to reach me, I was still living in Ottawa, Canada—only two weeks before returning to take up an academic position in England. A phone call from a Canadian relative giving the bare outline of the events was followed by ever more detailed reports on CBC radio and television, and gradually the realization dawned on me, a life-long supporter of Sheffield Wednesday, that ninety-five people had met terrifying deaths on ‘my’ ground, and—to render the tragedy even more graphic for me—that they had died, crushed and asphyxiated, at my own ‘end’, the Leppings End, where I had spent so many hours of my childhood and teenage years. For me, this was not a tragedy like Bradford City, Heysel, Zeebrugge or even the Kings Cross Underground fire (though I had been to that place during many a visit to London): it was absolutely tangible, real and personal. I felt as if I knew every step and every crush barrier at the Leppings Lane End. And I was mortified, like every Wednesday supporter, by the thought that Hillsborough, so often described in Sheffield as the

'Wembley of the North',<sup>1</sup> had now joined Burnden Park in Bolton; Ibrox Park in Glasgow; Valley Parade in Bradford and, of course, the Heysel Stadium in Brussels, on the list of post-war graveyards on European or, more particularly, on English soccer grounds.

To the North American press, the fact that ninety-five people could have died *attempting to enter* a spectator sport was beyond comprehension. The very concept of a standing terrace packed to capacity is, in itself, almost unheard of in a culture in which spectator sport is either played before relatively small, all-seated audiences in enclosed buildings built to withstand the weather (ice hockey), or, in the summer months, in massive seated baseball or football stadia. These particular stadia are designed in order to house paying audiences for very long hours, thus enabling the club owners to exact considerable sums from each spectator in the form of drinks, hordogs and other consumables. Many of these purchases take place during the frequent breaks in the game that are timed to allow for television and also radio advertisements (baseball, American and Canadian football). Given the dominance of this modernized and highly rationalized version of spectator sport everywhere in North America, the only explanation offered of the Hillsborough tragedy—at least in the Canadian press—was that soccer in Britain continues to be played in stadia that are 'old'. The *Globe and Mail*, which describes itself as 'Canada's National Newspaper', offered the generalization that all of England's ninety-two Football League Clubs existed on grounds built before 1900.<sup>2</sup> It chose not to discuss the enormous sums of money that have been spent on the modernization of many senior grounds in the twentieth century—in particular, the very considerable sums of money spent on Hillsborough during the run-up to the World Cup of 1966, and in subsequent years (most notably, the modernization and covering of the Spion Kop end during the close season 1987–8). Even more disingenuously, the Canadian *Financial Post*, some two weeks later, carried an analytical piece culled directly from the *Financial Times* in Britain, in which the tragedy at Hillsborough was attributed to the 'lack of money' circulating in British soccer:<sup>3</sup> this piece may or may not have attracted much reflective thought in a country where one of the three major national spectator sports (Canadian football), with its nine teams averaging only about fifteen thousand in attendances (the tenth 'franchise'—in Montreal—having folded) is widely thought to be in its death throes.

It is important for me personally to write about Hillsborough, and only one commentator in the national press, Jeremy Seabrook, has even approached what I want to say.<sup>4</sup> North American sports journalists, it seems fair to say, will *never* be able to understand the

---

<sup>1</sup> A local saying that was conjured up, despairingly, in the piece entitled 'Hillsborough's Reputation as the Wembley of the North'. *The Star, Sheffield, Hillsborough Disaster Special*, 16 April 1989, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 17 April 1989.

<sup>3</sup> 'Money Worries Underlie Soccer Tragedy'.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Seabrook, 'We Were Caged Like Animals In A Zoo', *Guardian*, 17 April 1989.

meaning of Hillsborough, if all that they can say is that the football grounds of England are old and that there is less money in spectator sport than in the States.<sup>3</sup> *England is old* and, for the time being at least, there probably is less money in many parts of Britain than in North America (in sports or in any other area of human endeavour). But that lack of modernity—a penalty of England's leading role in the industrial revolution—does not explain our present troubles.

I want here to offer six connected 'contemplations' about Hillsborough. Together they make an argument of sorts, and they are at least an expression of my need to say something serious and complex, rather than merely reactive or trivial, about what happened at 'my' ground on Saturday, 15 April.

### 1. The Soccer Ground as a Shrine

I want, first, to recognize the ways in which supporters of Sheffield Wednesday, Liverpool and Everton (and according to many accounts, supporters of Liverpool's semi-final rivals, Nottingham Forest) responded to the deaths of the ninety-five fans. The 'reconstruction' and decoration of the goalmouths at Hillsborough and Anfield with flowers, wreaths, and other memorabilia of soccer, including, apparently, scarves of the *Juventus* club, on Saturday evening and Sunday morning, 16 April, by supporters of all these clubs, was nothing if not a mass popular religious rite, largely without parallel, to my knowledge, in Britain this century. Nothing similar followed the Kings Cross fire or even the London Underground and Southern Region disasters, though certainly there were reports of the traditional maritime ceremonials marking the sinking of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*—the throwing of wreaths onto the waters at Zeebrugge Harbour. The decoration of Anfield and Hillsborough had no such formal quality, however. Mourners carried with them to the ground, and left behind in the goals, the most basic, personal and *apparently* trivial of memorabilia. One CBC television clip showed a quite elderly Sheffield Wednesday supporter depositing what was presumably his only personal copy of the 1966 Cup Final programme (played between Sheffield Wednesday and Everton); the only close connection he could make 'affectively' with Liverpool. The only parallel to this simple offering of minimalist but intensely personal belongings that I have ever witnessed was at the Shrine of Guadalupe, in Mexico City. During my visit there in 1970, I saw poor peasants and others, all with desperate physical illnesses or crippling disabilities, crawl across the forecourt of the church to make their humble offerings to their God. But I was

---

<sup>3</sup> American press coverage of nearly all such English disasters has consistently been framed in terms of an image of England (and, on occasion, of Europe in general)—where it is not actually a haven of terrorists and muggers—as a dangerously antiquated and pre-modern place. These accounts are, of course, constructed, in part, as a reassurance for the American audience they serve to provide evidence of societies that are less safe and less modern than post-Reagan America, despite all its problems of an over-accelerated work culture, a constant threat of street violence, a cocaine epidemic and, indeed, quite crucially, of a culture that is widely experienced as lacking depth and passion.

also reminded, when looking at the Anfield and Hillsborough shrines, of the much more formalized annual rituals in Derbyshire, the 'well-dressings', where flowers are fashioned into what are also known as shrines, dedicated usually to particular saints, or, in some villages, to pagan godheads.

The pictures of the shrines shown on television, and later, the repeated photographs carried in the daily press and in specialist soccer magazines, also reminded me that soccer stadia have historically for long periods been the objects of what we might call popular sanctification.<sup>6</sup> Certainly the description of Hillsborough used in the 1950s by my father as we got off the tram at Parkside Road, and walked along Penistone Road to spend a few minutes outside the Players' Entrance (hoping for a glimpse, perhaps, of Albert Quixall, the 'Golden Boy' of the Hillsborough faithful) was that we had come to 'the shrine'. When pitch invasions began, in 1962, and continued over subsequent years, I was insistently told, by both my father and my uncle, that this *never* happened 'in their day'—because, in their day, they said, the pitch was *sacred*. In several newspaper reports written about Hillsborough, especially those emphasizing the way in which the magnitude of the disaster had occasioned an enormous show of solidarity between soccer supporters, and a suspension of the aggravation and enmity that has characterized football rivalry, there was a heart-felt sense that the creation of these shrines at Anfield and Hillsborough might mark a cleansing of a sport bespoilt by a history of divisiveness and violence ever since the 1960s. Such hopes were given further sustenance, and an ironic, symbolic significance, by the sight on television of Liverpool and Everton fans reverently parading around Goodison Park with ninety-five red and blue scarves knotted together in a continuous line, before the start of the Everton–Liverpool league game on 10 May, some twenty-five days after the disaster.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Edgell has pointed out, in conversation, that soccer grounds have also been 'venerated', in part, as architectural icons: football supporters have retained strong affection for particular aspects of the stadia (the famous 'cottage' at Fulham, the grand entrance to Villa Park main stand, the Clock stand at Highbury, the concourse at Old Trafford, etc.) It speaks volumes about the indifference of 'established opinion' that this form of popular interest in the football ground is never reflected in recognized literature or talk on the history of British architecture. For further discussion of the football ground itself as an arena of sociability, see Stephen Edgell and David Jary, 'Football: A Sociological Eulogy' in M. Smith, S. Parker and C. Smith, *Leisure and Society in Britain*, London 1973.

<sup>7</sup> Such hopes were quickly dashed by the pitch invasions and aggravation on the part of Birmingham City fans at Crystal Palace and also by the violent attacks by soccer fans on members of the public at the Watford Gap motorway service station on Saturday, 13 May, a day on which there were 220 arrests at soccer games in England and Wales. These incidents did not, however, prevent the country-wide sympathy for the City of Liverpool in the weeks after Hillsborough, or the admiration evinced by the sight of Everton and Liverpool fans working together as fund-raisers for the Hillsborough Disaster Fund. In the words of a subsequent Sheffield Wednesday match-day programme 'Make no mistake, Sheffield Wednesday and its people share Liverpool's suffering. Aside from the overriding feeling of sorrow for the families who have lost loved ones, the city mourns the fate that has befallen its premier sporting venue. Sheffield, like Liverpool, has been united by an emotional bond that transcends the traditional rivalry between its clubs.' (Alan Biggs, 'At Close Range', *Sheffield Wednesday vs. Middlesbrough, Matchday Programme*, 13 May 1989)

## 2. The Ground as an Emblem of Locality

The reconstruction of the ground as a shrine is a natural extension of existing relationships of the club to the fan: football grounds across the country have always had an almost religious hold on football fans and, indeed, on the families and kin on whom these, mainly male, fans have imposed their weekend and mid-week-evening obsession. In different parts of the country, however, these shrines have taken on a particularly important additional significance as an *emblem of locality*, often quite widely shared, irrespective of gender position. Sheffield itself, unlike Liverpool (with its inimitable waterfront and its Victorian and Georgian arcades), and Manchester (with its venerable Victorian insurance buildings and St Peter's and Albert Squares) is a Northern industrial city with no really outstanding architectural or other features (although lovers of the city, like myself, will always speak fondly of the Crucible Theatre, right in the city centre, and then fervently of the Peak District, on the city's doorstep, as unsurpassable features of the place). For many working Sheffielders, however, the symbol of the city's local pride (particularly since the closure of Bramall Lane as a Yorkshire cricket ground) has been Hillsborough itself, which has been remodelled and upgraded consistently over the years, and, in the football community itself and beyond, is widely regarded as one of the best and most modern of stadia for spectator sport in Britain. In the recently re-released and quite marvellous survey of *Football Grounds of Great Britain*, Simon Inglis observes about Hillsborough that it:

has proved that a club can provide all the facilities that a supporter wants, without robbing the surroundings of its intrinsic character. It is surely no coincidence that Wednesday men are always ready to talk about the club and about Hillsborough, and about the city of Sheffield that everyone seems to love... a visit to Hillsborough on a crisp, autumn afternoon remains one of the quintessential joys of English sport.<sup>8</sup>

In the local paper, the *Sheffield Star*, on the Monday after the disaster, a long-time local Sheffield-born sports reporter, Paul Thompson, wrote in sorrow and in dismay:

Oh no... not Hillsborough. Wednesday and their supporters are trying to come to terms with the fact that football's worst tragedy has occurred where nobody would have least expected it...<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> (cont.)

Subsequent to Liverpool's 3-2 victory over Everton in the 'memorial' Cup Final on 30 May, press reports indicated that fans of Liverpool and Everton were united in praising Liverpool's achievement. It is even reported that during the traditional home-coming of the Cup victors—attended by an estimated half a million people—there was a 'roaring trade in Liverpool hats and badges' bought and worn by Everton fans in tribute to the ninety-five dead of Hillsborough (Michael Morris, 'Liverpool's Cup Overflows', *Guardian*, 22 May 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Simon Inglis, *The Football Grounds of Great Britain*, London 1987, p. 97. But see also Inglis' article 'When The Best Is Not Good Enough', *Guardian*, 17 April 1989, simply arguing that, because of the unpredictable element, 'the human equation'... 'there is a limit to how much safer football stadiums can be made'.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Thompson, 'Oh No, Not Hillsborough', *The Star, Sheffield*, 17 April 1989, p. 17.

He quotes Rita Nettleship, secretary of the Supporters' Club, as puzzling over the irony that:

If it had happened at any of the other grounds we have criticized . . . but at Hillsborough .<sup>10</sup>

and he concludes:

It is so sad that one of football's old clubs, run by decent men, is now synonymous not with sport, but with death on a grand scale.

That is why the club and its followers can barely comprehend what has happened to them.<sup>11</sup>

In Liverpool itself, the importance of the club to 'the people' was being displayed in ways which confounded even the most seasoned of footballers and football managers themselves. As Jeremy Seabrook so succinctly put it, this may be because football 'continues to reach' some aspects of the social being which cannot be fulfilled in private life or in ritualized public consumerism. That is to say, that football continues, obstinately and insistently, to represent:

the passion of locality and of places once associated with something other than football teams.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of Liverpool, this has an unbearably tragic quality, since:

[in this] great maritime city, with its decayed function rooted in an archaic Imperial and industrial past, sport now has to bear a freight of symbolism that it can scarcely contain.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.. Hillsborough and the Rhetoric of Modernization

This 'decaying' of Liverpool must be seen, in part, as an expression of the inability of *capital* on Merseyside to anticipate shifts in patterns of maritime trade, and preemptively to restructure the local economy.<sup>14</sup> And it does seem persuasive, at one level, to transfer this kind of explanation directly and laterally to the analysis of organized football, and especially to the analysis of the organizational form and the culture of the average football club in Britain. The truth is that the

---

<sup>10</sup> *The Star, Sheffield*, 17 April 1989, p. 17

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> Seabrook, *op cit*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> There are several other interpretations of the decline of the Merseyside economy. In a particularly unpleasant essay in class-hatred, one Richard West, writing for *The Spectator* in the immediate aftermath of the Heysel disaster, argues that it was no surprise that 'Liverpool was the English city responsible for the murders last week in the Brussels football ground . . . (because) Liverpool displays in their most disgusting form the open sores of the English disease that has made this country at first pined abroad, then scorned and now detested' The de-industrialization of Liverpool is seen, simply and straightforwardly, as resulting from the 'bloody-mindedness' of the trade unions in the Mersey Docks and the support given by the local Labour Movement to the idea of welfarism and state dependency. Richard West, 'From Great Port to Piggery', *The Spectator*, 8 June 1985, pp 15-16.



English football clubs have not been very much interested in modernizing the kinds of provision made for spectators, whether in terms of updating terracing, seating, toilet facilities, public address systems or first aid facilities—or, equally tellingly, in terms of the provision of refreshments and other consumable items. The standard half-time experience at the average English soccer club, in 1989, is of a ten-minute wait in line for a tepid and tasteless cup of tea in a polystyrene cup, for the aptly-named Pukka pie (a food item which would not be offered, in North America, to a dog). What might have been taken for granted by a working-class soccer supporter in 1949 is unacceptable forty years later, in a society whose consciousness of the quality of food, and of consumer service generally, has significantly, if unevenly, expanded.

In the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster, the blindness and inattention of soccer's Boards of Directors to questions of the modernization of spectator facilities has properly become the subject of critical attention, on the part of both politicians and the media—most significantly and predictably in *The Economist*, a key voice of progressive capital.<sup>15</sup> And, as indicated earlier, the 'failure to modernize' theme has been the dominant *leitmotiv* in North American reportage on Hillsborough. But I do want to insist that the failures of soccer clubs in respect of modernization do not constitute in and of themselves an adequate explanation of Hillsborough, and that, therefore, 'modernization' in and of itself would be no guarantee of public safety and provision, with respect to British soccer crowds in particular. The pivotal fact about Hillsborough, and the deaths of ninety-five people, was not 'the absence of modern provision', although this may have played a really important role in the communication problems that were evident between the club and the police, in the melee developing outside the Leppings Lane end turnstiles before the kick-off; and it was certainly underlined by the appalling absence of first-aid provision and emergency preparedness in the aftermath of the disaster itself. The determining cause, if this is the appropriate word, of the Hillsborough disaster was, indeed, the way in which the Leppings Lane terrace, like so many of the 'popular ends' at English soccer grounds, had been reconstructed over the years as a caged-in 'pen' from which there was no means of escape at a predictable moment of crisis of mass spectator excitement and anxiety. It is vital to understand that this process of caging-in a section of the soccer audience, identifiable with that portion of the underclass seen to be generally and universally capable of violent behaviour, is a *social* process—prioritizing 'secure containment'—and a product or expression of a particular historical and political moment deriving from the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See 'Football's Shame', *The Economist*, 22 April 1989, pp. 55–60.

<sup>16</sup> The acquiescence of most 'terrace supporters' to the poverty of facilities they encounter at soccer grounds, and also to their routine treatment as a hooligan mass, by the police outside the grounds, is one of the most remarkable features of soccer in the 1970s and 1980s. Only in recent years, with the growth of 'fanzines' self-produced by supporters themselves (at over two-thirds of all League clubs), and the establishment of the national Football Supporters Association, have spectators been provided with a voice. Many of these fanzines have dwelt at length on the dangerous conditions in which spectators have been asked to watch football, and can even claim to have predicted a disaster on the scale of Hillsborough.

The Wheatley Report on Crowd Safety at Soccer Grounds of 1972 was a response to a series of pitch invasions, and scenes of aggravation (or 'aggro') occurring within soccer grounds, or their immediate environs, primarily in England or among English fans travelling in Europe. Its key recommendations focused on the establishment and enforcement of a minimum standard for the time required for 'egress' from a stadium. In particular, the Wheatley Report's main recommendation was that:

egress from each area of spectator accommodation should be so designed that all spectators can leave that area and if desired pass into a free-flowing exit route system in 8 minutes or less

In the more recent version of the original Wheatley booklet of 'voluntary guidance', the *Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds*, released by the Home Office in 1986 in the aftermath of Bradford,<sup>17</sup> there is some notional discussion of how one might re-calculate 'evacuation time' in circumstances of fire (an expression, obviously, of the shock provoked by the Bradford fire). The booklet then rather disingenuously avoids the issues of fencing entirely and observes that:

Where the playing area or perimeter track is accessible to spectators and is considered suitable as a place of safety, evacuation onto it can be taken into account in calculating the emergency evacuation time. (para. 186)

The booklet also goes into considerable technical discussion regarding conditions of 'ingress' into the ground, and, above all, emphasizes the principle that 'spectators should be admitted at a rate which is compatible with the dispersal arrangements for them inside the ground' (p. 20).

It specifically articulates the principles that:

turnstiles should be of such numbers as to admit spectators at a rate whereby no unduly large crowds are kept waiting for admission and yet at no faster rate than the arrangements for distributing spectators within a ground permit (para. 44)

and also that 'contingency plans' which include the opening of additional entrances may be appropriate, depending on 'local knowledge of the ground, crowd patterns and advice from the police' (para. 46). These contingency plans should involve all larger grounds having 'intercommunication systems' and 'metering systems at turnstiles' and it is also indicated that the installation of a central computerized monitoring system may be 'of assistance' (para. 46).

Most senior soccer clubs in England now vehemently proclaim that these standards have been put in place and enforced in their own stadia, although many soccer spectators still wonder at the inaudible public address systems and the primitive nature of the 'crowd handling' evident at even the most prominent of grounds. Either way, the fact is that the Wheatley Report's recommendations with respect

---

<sup>17</sup> *Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds*, London: HMSO, para. 56.

to architectural design and safety and, in particular, the restructuring of the entrance and exit areas in stadia have been 'overdetermined' or, in more common parlance, over-ruled *with respect to the popular ends*, by established authority's developing obsession with 'containment' of the mass, and penal discipline of the individual offender, at the popular ends, as a solution to soccer violence. The fact that the problem of soccer violence actually intensified (especially during the late 1970s and early 1980s) *in parallel with—and as if in response to—the intensification of the containment-and-discipline strategy of state authority* seems to have escaped the attention of most commentators.

This 'overdetermination' of the issue of crowd safety and provision by the rhetoric of violence control at containment is most graphically illustrated, of course, in the Official Inquiry into the Bradford City fire in April 1986 (the Popplewell Report).<sup>18</sup> Initiated as the response of the Government to the death-by-fire of fifty-seven soccer fans in a wooden stand whose seats enclosed and preserved the accumulated litter of years, but then widened in its mandate to discuss some aspects of a violent incident at Birmingham City ground, and the Heysel disaster itself, the Popplewell Report moves effortlessly from the discussion of expert evidence on the dangers posed by unattended, accumulated litter, the velocity of fire movement and other technical aspects of the circumstances leading to the Valley Parade incineration, to a series of recommendations that highlight the revision of criminal law, particularly in respect of the police 'powers of search' of spectators awaiting entry to grounds. The 'logic' of the Popplewell Report only makes sense, in fact, as an example of the overdetermination of issues of crowd safety and provision in 1986 by issues of containment and penal discipline. There is some discussion in the Popplewell Report of the fact that those who died at Bradford did so because the exit doors at the rear of the stand had been locked—in defiance of all the Wheatley Report's recommendations regarding minimal times of egress and 'contingency evacuation time', and there is also some discussion of the truth, much discussed amongst soccer supporters themselves, that the vast majority of the three thousand spectators sitting in the incinerated stand would also have died, had the perimeter fencing then required of all First and Second Division clubs been in place at Bradford, and therefore all means of escape onto the playing pitch itself been obstructed. But the Report still sees fit to declare that 'for practical reasons, it is not possible to allow rival fans to be present at a game unless they are both segregated and penned in.'

The Wheatley Report's recommendations do seem to have been widely applied with respect to 'the stands', where a seated audience, quite clearly distinguished in the minds of both political and football authorities from the inhabitants of the 'popular ends' and paying a higher price for its entry ticket, is accommodated. But throughout the later 1970s and 1980s, in particular, this regulation of safety in the stands has co-existed with, and been powerfully overdetermined by, the escalation of containment measures (including measures of physical

<sup>18</sup> *Commission of Enquiry into Crowd Safety and Control at Soccer Grounds* (Chairman. Mr Justice Popplewell). (Final Report) London: HMSO, cmd. 2710.

containment) that are thought, within the limits of dominant ideological and political assumption, to be relevant to the defeat of soccer violence.<sup>19</sup> At the Leppings Lane end at Hillsborough, once the spectator is inside the ground, there are now a far more limited number of routes to the terrace than existed during the 1950s, and generally a much tighter and more restricted terrace space.

#### 4. 'Normalizing' Hillsborough: the Official and the Popular

The alacrity with which Mrs Thatcher got herself to Sheffield to visit victims of the Hillsborough disaster—like the speed with which the Prime Minister appeared so rapidly at hospital bedsides in the aftermath of many another public disaster—has been the subject of much comment. In Sheffield itself, until so very recently dubbed the headquarters of the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire, there has been local commentary on the fact that it took a disaster of such magnitude to prompt a Prime Ministerial visit to 'this part of the country'<sup>20</sup>. The appearance of Mrs Thatcher at hospitals and/or at the scenes of disasters themselves (wherever they occur) has, however, become one of the more predictable aspects of political and social life in Britain in the 1980s.

It is also predictable, of course, that a disaster of the scope of Hillsborough would result in the establishment of an official enquiry: so also did the football disasters at Bolton, Ibrox, Bradford, and indirectly, at the Heysel Stadium. In Britain, enquiries into such breakdowns of the assumed and routine practices of authority, both public and private, and their relations with the citizenry (or of what one might call the taken-for-granted custodianship of the citizenry by the state and other authorities) are always conducted by members of the judiciary, whereas, in the United States and in many European countries, they might be conducted by senior officials within the State executive arm. In the Commissions of Enquiry completed within the US into urban violence and crime, into pornography and sexuality, and a host of related areas, the process of collecting evidence and organizing an analysis of the problem in order to move strategically towards a solution has routinely involved the participation of scholars and practitioners who are closely involved in the problem, or who have spent years in scholarly or applied research in the area. In Britain, however, such expertise and practical knowledge seems to take second place to the requirement that an 'independent' adjudication of a problem, or indeed of a disaster, be exercised by a senior member of the High Court. The main qualification for the selection of such

---

<sup>19</sup> It is almost a commonplace now, amongst students of soccer violence, that the overwhelming majority of violent confrontations between fans occur outside the ground (away from the surveillance of police or other authority). The true purpose of the perimeter fences at soccer grounds is to prevent pitch invasions, what is at issue here is whether this objective can only be achieved by creating the kind of human death-trap that was evident at Hillsborough on 15 April 1989.

<sup>20</sup> *The Independent*, of 22 April, carried a report in Jonathon Foster's Diary, confirming that 'Margaret Thatcher was an unwelcome visitor for some patients and staff at hospitals bearing the brunt of the tragedy: one man waited two hours in the open to give the Prime Minister a two-fingered salute as she flew overhead'.

persons, in general terms, seems to be that they have developed, in the course of their occupational socialization and upward mobility within the legal profession, a finely tuned understanding of what kinds of solutions, and, indeed, what kinds of analyses, are acceptable—both in general and in more specific conjunctural terms—within the corridors of power. The domination of these enquiries by judges is a function of their refined understanding and practice of what Frank Burton and Pat Carlen, in reference to official inquiries into the Irish question, once called Official Discourse.<sup>21</sup>

The appropriateness of the use of the judiciary in such moments of crisis in the relationship of citizens and authority is rarely called directly into question, except, perhaps, in the fanzines produced by football supporters themselves (see footnote 15). But it is noticeable that the national press often goes to great lengths to discuss the kinds of personal qualities that judges bring to their specific commission. Mr Justice Taylor, who is chairing the official Enquiry into Hillsborough, has been described in press reports as a product of Newcastle Royal Grammar School and as an 'unpompous' man 'with a common touch':<sup>22</sup> this is presumably thought to be important for an enquiry that will involve taking evidence from fans at the 'popular end'—the Liverpool fans who personally witnessed the horrific scenes in the Leppings Lane tunnel and up against the fences behind the Leppings Lane goal.

It is no part of these reflections to cast any doubt on the personal qualities of Mr Justice Taylor. But it is a part of our concern to note that there have been at least three such major, official, authoritative enquiries in respect of soccer disasters, chaired by members of the judiciary in the earlier post-war period, and that each of these enquiries has tended 'in the final analysis' to reproduce, albeit in the measured and sometimes elegant tones of the senior judiciary, the political, and commonsense, assumptions that are dominant in powerful circles at that particular moment.

The official Enquiry into the Bolton disaster in 1947 spoke powerfully about the need to limit the size of crowds at a time of mass, popular interest in soccer: it said nothing about the modernization of the conditions offered to spectators, whether seated or standing, in the light of the game's new-found post-war popularity. The Popplewell Enquiry, as already indicated, especially in its interim report, started out as an examination of fire risks and the relations of the safety inspectorate to private soccer clubs, but it finished up reading like a contribution to the debate, which was then current in England, on the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill and the extension of police powers of search.

There must be the fear, indeed, that the report on the Hillsborough

---

<sup>21</sup> Frank Burton and Pat Carlen, *Official Discourse*, London 1979

<sup>22</sup> Dennis Barker, 'Man for the People's Game', *Guardian*, 18 April 1989. Press accounts about Mr Justice Popplewell's appointment in 1985 were at great pains to emphasize his particular interest in cricket.

disaster will be significantly and powerfully inflected by the current Government's obsessive belief in the introduction of identity card schemes as a 'solution' to the soccer problem.

Vic Duke, in a recent paper to the European Congress on Violence Control in the World of Sports, has shown the irrelevance of this scheme to most of the problems confronting organized spectator football in England, and, in particular, its real irrelevance with respect to the control of violence around soccer.<sup>23</sup> There is, indeed, a deep suspicion, in many quarters, that underlying the Government's commitment to the Identity Card system, rather than a serious intent to tackle the roots of violence in British soccer, is a conscious drive towards the 'rolling back' of professional soccer as a mass spectator sport.<sup>24</sup> The only incontrovertible effects of the 'ID' scheme, after all, would be a substantial reduction in attendances at soccer games, and a further economic weakening of the community-based, local soccer club.

It is possible, of course, that Mr Justice Taylor's Enquiry will depart from tradition and make recommendations regarding crowd safety that break, imaginatively, from the dominant 'law-and-order' rhetoric emphasizing secure containment of the popular ends. It may even be the first such Government enquiry to try to go to the roots of the problems of British soccer (class divisions among spectators, the restricted and masculinist code of the young soccer fan, etc., etc.). It is far more likely, sadly, that the Enquiry will focus on the construction of more humane and less palpably dangerous means of perimeter-policing (plastic perspex dividers, moats, etc.), directed, in particular, at the popular ends. It is also quite likely that it will dwell on the problems of communication between the South Yorkshire police and club officials as the specific disaster at Hillsborough unfolded. But all of this will probably be underlined by support for the Government's proposed 'ID scheme or (possibly) by 'progressive capital's' vision of the building of new, modernized all-seater stadia throughout the country. In other words, there is more than likely to be an attempt to ignore, marginalize or *normalize* the broader set of social relations (of mass social and geographical inequality and masculinity), and authority's strategy of containment itself, that fed, so crucially, into the Hillsborough disaster.

Something of the same process of 'normalization' is evident in the reactions of the Football Association, football writers and football authorities generally, in the weeks since 15 April. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster (perhaps in a barely sublimated memory of the 1986 European Cup Final, which was actually played out to a conclusion, in an ethereal, ghost-like manner in the minutes following the deaths in the Heysel Stadium) the Liverpool Club indicated that it

---

<sup>23</sup> Vic Duke, 'The Football Spectators Bill. Whose Problem Will It Solve?' (February 1989). See also Steve Redhead's extensive analysis 'The Last Football Bill', Manchester Polytechnic Working Papers No. 1 (1989).

<sup>24</sup> It is notable how often the Conservative press in Britain makes reference to the notorious editorial in the *Sunday Times*, after Heysel, which concluded that the crisis of British football lies in the fact of being 'a slum sport played in slum stadiums and increasingly watched by slum people'. *Sunday Times*, 19 May 1989.

wanted to suspend all its fixtures for the rest of the season, including its games in the FA Cup. Kenny Dalglish, the Liverpool Manager, was quoted as saying: 'Football is irrelevant when something like this happens' (*Observer*, 16 April 1989).

A memorial service was hurriedly arranged at Liverpool's Roman Catholic Cathedral on Sunday, 16 April (with five thousand in attendance, and eight thousand other mourners outside) and the Liverpool Manager, and several of the Liverpool players (most notably, the Liverpool-born John Aldridge) were quoted as saying that they could not contemplate playing football in the immediate future, and that, minimally, the decision as to whether Liverpool Football Club should continue to play out its remaining Cup and League games should be a decision of 'the people of Liverpool' and, particularly, those who had been bereaved. He reiterated, once again, that 'the football doesn't matter any more' and then elaborated this sentiment with a powerful local reference:

When we go to play at Anfield again it will be a different feeling. The whole concept of the Kop and the goalmouth has changed (*Guardian*, 18 April 1989)

This sentiment seemed to be echoed by leaders of the Liverpool City Council, who themselves declared a week of mourning and indicated that no Hillsborough victims' families 'would go without'. 'This city will look after its own.'<sup>25</sup>

For a moment, there was a pressing sense that the Liverpool managers and players, along with the City Council and the local clergy, recognized, in a very fundamental sense, that 'Hillsborough' had indeed rendered problematic a continuation of the normal relations of the football club (and, behind it, the Football League, the FA and the familiar apparatus that is the professional football industry) vis-à-vis the community. But the problem that was posed was not a problem of un-modernized stadia or the absence of consumer-friendly free market forces, but the problem of the contact which football has lost with its traditional constituency: 'the people'. For a particular moment, in the week after 15 April, there was an insistent resurrection, in 'the talk about Hillsborough', of Arthur Hopcraft's idea of football as 'the people's game'<sup>26</sup> *par excellence*: a form of passionate working-class poetry and, indeed, a vital emblem of the distinctive qualities of one's own locality.

From the very earliest days after Hillsborough, however, other voices were raised against the suspension of Liverpool's remaining fixtures.

---

<sup>25</sup> Kevan Coombes, leader of Liverpool City Council, quoted in syndicated article by James Dalrymple, 'City in Mourning', *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 April 1989. The full, powerful statement read: 'Nobody will want for anything and certainly not money. We intend to get to every single family and make sure they get everything they need. This city will look after its own.'

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Hopcraft, *The People's Game*, London 1968

The Chief Executive of the Football Association, Mr Graham Kelly, said that 'although most football fans no longer cared who won, "we must go on".'

The FA Chairman, Mr Bert Millichip, echoed this sentiment, indicating in the meantime that he felt the profits of any such games should be given directly to the relatives.<sup>27</sup> Mr James Lawton, 'Sports Journalist of the Year', writing in the *Daily Express*, supported this view, arguing that the suspension of the Cup competition would be 'an insult to the memory of those who died amidst the horrible chaos'. He then developed the argument, previously discussed, that 'the English fan and the game have to be led by the example of North America and much of Western Europe. The best memorial,' he wrote, 'is to make English football a decent, safe place for decent people.'<sup>28</sup>

Accounts of this kind did not elaborate how this transformation of English soccer might take place, and, in particular, how this transformation might take place in a society like England, which is so fundamentally divided and indeed defined by the facts of class and geographical inequality. Nor did they explain how such transformations could occur without loss of the passion and commitment which have been so vital to the game's long history, but which are widely reported to be missing from the 'home supporters only' experiment at Luton Town and, indeed, from the newly constructed, and highly modern, new ground now occupied by Scunthorpe United.

On 30 April, the Chairman of Liverpool Football Club, Mr John Smith, announced that the Club had decided to remain in the FA Cup and also, by implication, to continue with their programme of League matches. In part, he justified this decision as being the decision of the players themselves:

It was the players who informed us that, in the relatives' opinion, the game should go on. We have also had a lot of letters to that effect (*Sunday Times*, 30 April 1989).

In the weeks that followed, the Liverpool team won their way through to the F.A. Cup Final, and then went on to beat Everton in extra time to win what they hoped would be the first leg of the famous 'double'. They then remained unbeaten in the League, until the final, vital, League game against Arsenal at Anfield on 26 May, which they lost in the final minute, so conceding the League Championship to their London rivals. Even in the aftermath of this last defeat, however, it was the achievement of the Liverpool players on the field in the month of May that was being offered as the real tribute to those who died at Hillsborough. 'Liverpool' had at least won the Cup and come second in the League and it was as if the other matters that had so fundamentally disrupted 'normal' relations of the Club, and the sport, to its

---

<sup>27</sup> *Guardian*, 18 April 1989.

<sup>28</sup> James Lawton, 'They'll Never Grieve Alone', *Daily Express*, 17 April 1989.



broad constituency, if not actually forgotten, were now significantly assuaged. But, as the sense of normality returned, there were few signs of the emergence, in public or political talk, of strategies directed either towards the radical modernization of the soccer club or towards the diminution of the social inequalities that give rise, in the first place, to the phenomenon of the 'popular end', and the associated threat of violence or tragedy.

## 5. The Rhetoric on Violence

In many press reports, and, in particular, in the reports produced about Hillsborough in the European press, the disaster in Sheffield was seen straightforwardly as a further expression of English soccer hooliganism. The Belgian newspaper, *La Dernière Heure*, was quoted as saying:

Don't tell us that there is no connection between what happened in Brussels on 29 May 1985 and the terrible catastrophe in Sheffield. This was not a question of hooliganism. The supporters of the Reds attacked no one. But the question must be asked about the attitude of people who, with or without a ticket, have deliberately risked triggering this drama

The same report, by Martin Kettle, quoted a Professor George Vigar-ello of the Université de Paris as saying:

It has always been the same. The English football fan is violent. He comes to the ground in groups, with his mates. He pushes and shouts.<sup>29</sup>

Undoubtedly the most notorious reaction from Europe to the disaster, however, was the set of comments made by M. Jacques Georges of the European Football Association, in describing Liverpool supporters as 'beasts' and heavily implying that the Hillsborough disaster ought to be understood, primarily, as an expression of that truth. These comments provoked great anger in Liverpool, and even evinced a direct, admonitory response from Mr Hurd, the British Home Secretary<sup>30</sup>, who averred that there was no violence at Hillsborough, contrary to what M. Georges may have been told. In Liverpool itself, any comments linking Hillsborough with the events at the Heysel were seen as an intolerable slur, on Liverpool fans in general and on the city as a whole.

The truth is, however, that for many observers of Hillsborough and for several other commentators, not all of them committed to the abolition of soccer as a people's sport, there *were* certain important connections between what happened at the Heysel and the Hillsborough disaster.<sup>31</sup>

Mr Rogan Taylor, the Liverpoolian secretary of the Football Supporters

---

<sup>29</sup> Martin Kettle, 'Feelings Abroad about the Soccer Disaster', *Guardian*, 20 April 1989.

<sup>30</sup> 'Hurd Slams the "Beast Fans" Tag', *Manchester Evening News*, 18 April 1989, p. 3

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Peter Marshall, 'From Heysel to Hillsborough', *The Listener*, 11 May 1989.

Association, has argued eloquently within Britain and on international television that Hillsborough was a product, in some important senses, of rigid behavioural patterns that have grown up around soccer games over the last two decades. He singled out, in particular, the kind of tribal aggression that soccer fans, deprived by education or social experience of any other focus for their personal identities or frustrations, exhibit towards each other. He also drew attention, with many other observers,<sup>32</sup> to the resiliently masculinist and chauvinist code of behaviour that is exhibited by young male soccer fans, and, in particular, to the central role played by drink in the ceremonial lead-up to the afternoon game. It is common knowledge among soccer supporters that Anfield (along with other English soccer grounds, like St James Park in Newcastle) can be relatively empty some ten minutes before kick-off, and then fill up rapidly as fans arrive in their masses from local public houses. There seems little doubt that something of this behaviour contributed to the extraordinary crush outside the Leppings Lane turnstiles on 15 April: one witness to Mr Justice Taylor's enquiry, a Mrs Angela Hockenhull, who runs a carpentry workshop near Hillsborough, was quoted as saying that groups of twenty Liverpool fans came into her front garden to urinate, exposing themselves when requested to leave, and that most of the fans 'thronging outside the ground' after 2.30 pm were drunk.<sup>33</sup>

In Sheffield itself, a series of unpleasant stories continue to circulate about the behaviour of a minority of Liverpool fans after the disaster began to unfold. There is some scepticism about the reports, circulated nationally, that ambulancemen and police were assaulted during the disaster: many commentators observe that these 'assaults' may in fact have been the desperate attempts by fans who were trying to obtain help, sometimes in vain, to revive their stricken relatives.<sup>34</sup> But there have been persistent reports of some snatching of wallets from the dead or the dying, and also of some obstructive action by drunken and aggressive fans vis-à-vis the attempts being made to mount rescues and revivals on the terrace and on the Hillsborough playing field itself.<sup>35</sup>

Observations of this kind do not detract from the extraordinary acts of heroism, and the exhibition of fellow-feeling, which the majority of

---

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Ed Vulliamy 'Live by Aggro, Die by Aggro', *New Statesman*, 7 June 1985, and Dave Hill, 'Football's Prisoners of War', *The Independent (Weekend)* 22 April 1989. For an attempt at a more systematically sociological account of the male-bonding and limited social world found among young working class soccer fans, see Eric Dunning, Patrick Murphy and John Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*, London 1988.

<sup>33</sup> *Guardian*, 21 May 1989.

<sup>34</sup> 'Ambulancemen Assaulted at Hillsborough', *Guardian*, 24 May 1989.

<sup>35</sup> I am aware, here, of reproducing in this section the sense of alienation from working people who have been brutalized beyond any civic involvement and responsibility, that is expressed very vividly in the poetry of Tony Harrison (critically discussed by Ken Worpole in 'Scholarship Boy: the Poetry of Tony Harrison', *NLA* 153, Sept/Oct 1985, pp. 63-74). But against such a one-dimensional, despairing vision, I try to posit in this account the collectivism and the fellow-feeling, and indeed the sense of the sacred, that still remains embedded in the threatened and frightened institutions of a working class that is, unquestionably, under extraordinarily severe attack.

fans exhibited in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster. These have been subject to eloquent comment by several Liverpool players (John Aldridge<sup>36</sup>, Ian Rush<sup>37</sup>, Craig Johnston<sup>38</sup> and many others) and they have even been subject to praise by Mrs Thatcher herself, though it is inconceivable that she could understand the sense of fellow-feeling that binds supporters of football clubs together in this way.

But recognition of the heroism of the many does not extinguish the realities described by Rogan Taylor—realities which have been well-known for years to anyone who attends soccer games in England and which continue to afflict members of the public who find themselves on Inter-City trains, on other forms of public transport, or generally in city-centre public space, on Saturday evenings.

We do not want to claim that we have an immediate or practical answer to the problem being identified here: the demands for *immediate, practical answers* to soccer violence which have been so insistently put over the years *are*, in part, the discursive origins of the caged terraces at Hillsborough, as well as the attempt at Chelsea, in 1987, actually to electrify the perimeter fences. What seems absolutely clear, however, is that the issue has fundamentally to do with questions of education and with questions of public provision within the developing 'social market economy', and not, primarily, with issues of architectural containment and penal discipline.

We emphasize education (and the idea of public provision, or public custodianship, with which we will deal separately in our final consideration) rather than the facts of class inequality, for several, considered reasons. It is quite clear, for example, that soccer violence and hooliganism are not *in any straightforward sense* a product of social deprivation. I have argued elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> in fact, that the violence exhibited at the Heysel Stadium, and also routinely exhibited since the late 1960s by supporters of 'England' and of English clubs abroad,<sup>40</sup> is very much a product of the 'culture' of the upwardly-mobile, individualistic fraction of the (male) British working-class which has done relatively well out of the restructuring of British industry and business in the last twenty years. This fraction of the 'working-class' (first sighted, perhaps, in the lump workers in the building industry and in London's Docklands) has done well because of its ability to master particular crafts and to move between work sites. It has a certain residual sense of solidarity, born of neighbourhood and gender, but it is generally individualistic, chauvinistic and racist. It is this particular fraction of the class that has exhibited what Raymond Williams summarized in *The Long Revolution* and, again, in *Towards 2000*, as 'mobile

---

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, in the *Daily Mirror*, 17 May 1979.

<sup>37</sup> Ian Rush, 'The Fans are Fantastic', *School magazine*, 6 May 1989.

<sup>38</sup> Craig Johnston, in comments made in the half-time break during the televising of the Everton-Liverpool league game on 10 May 1989.

<sup>39</sup> Ian Taylor, 'Putting the Boot into a Working Class Sport: British Soccer after Bradford and Brussels', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1987, 5, pp. 171-91.

<sup>40</sup> For an account of the long series of incidents involving English soccer fans on the continent of Europe, see John Williams, Eric Dunning and Patrick Murphy, *Hooligans Abroad*, London 1984.

privatization',<sup>41</sup> and whose cultural and leisure preoccupations have more recently been pilloried quite mercilessly by commentators on the radical Right.<sup>42</sup> It is this particular fraction of the class, according to many different accounts, that is most deeply attached to its reading of the *Sun* newspaper and the *Sunday Sport*, and which was most enthusiastically carried along by the jingoistic nationalism that accompanied the Falklands/Malvinas war.

At the very lowest end of the British working-class, irretrievably caught in what Phil Cohen once described as an 'exploration' of 'downward mobility',<sup>43</sup> are cohorts of unemployed or underemployed young men, who have left school at sixteen, most with no qualifications or with a few largely irrelevant qualifications. They are the most visible and, indeed, in large part because of their untutored, unchallenged 'masculinity', the most troublesome fraction of the vast population of young people who leave school at this age (some seventy per cent of all pupils in Britain, compared with only thirty per cent in Japan and ten per cent in the United States). Glenwyn Benson and Stewart Lansley, analysing these figures, have shown that Britain has 'the lowest staying-on rates in Europe', the worst 'gap in attainment' between lowest and highest achievers of any comparable European or North American society and, most importantly for our purposes, the 'worst educated' population of youth of a country that describes itself as being 'advanced'.<sup>44</sup>

The overwhelming point about figures of this kind is the way in which they underline the 'conditions of existence'; the moral and cultural shallowness, and lack of alternative experience, which feeds into the tribal weekend rituals of the underclass soccer hooligan. But a similarly narrow form of socialization underpins the nationalistic aggravation exhibited by those workers who have escaped the trap of downward mobility, and, despite their lack of formal or non-technical education, can afford trips to the World Cup in Spain in 1982 or to the European Cup Final in Brussels in 1985. In the case of the downwardly-mobile and much less affluent underclass, no doubt, this passionate preoccupation each weekend with 'the club' they support is exacerbated by the pressing sense of being excluded from any alternative 'symbolic' world of personal reward or recognition.

The working class in Britain and in other industrial societies can be observed as a class that is fractured into many quite distinct component parts. The world of a respectable working class, gaining a

---

<sup>41</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, London 1961, and *Towards 2000*, London 1983, pp. 188–9.

<sup>42</sup> I have in mind, in particular, the acerbic comments of Evelyn Waugh, subsequent to Heyssel, proclaiming that 'the truth of Brussels . . . (was that) . . . none of these Merseyside animals were poor and few, apparently, were unemployed. They were quite simply our wonderful, overpaid "workers" on a spree and in a festive mood.' *The Spectator*, 8 June 1986, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Phil Cohen, 'Subcultural Conflict and Working Class Community' *Working Class in Cultural Studies*, 2 (1972) pp. 5–52.

<sup>44</sup> Glenwyn Benson and Stewart Lansley, 'Failing the Masses, Passing the Buck', *New Statesman*, 11 September 1987, pp. 10–12.

sense of self-worth through labour and immersion in relatively integrated communities, may, indeed, have gone forever; although it was a part of our earlier argument that this sense of 'fellow-feeling', and common destiny, was momentarily or 'magically' recaptured in the scenes of collaborative activity during the immediate aftermath of the Leppings Lane crush, and in the ensuing two weeks of 'abnormal' relations between the Liverpool Club and its supporters, as well as in the work done by working-class fans from different, often 'competing' teams across the country for the Hillsborough Disaster Fund.

The question of what a relevant education might look like in a society like Britain in the late 1980s is now under widespread discussion, but, under the leadership of Mr Kenneth Baker and the Department of Education, this 'debate' has focused almost entirely on the introduction of a Core Curriculum, with a significantly increased component of Science and Technology, and some greater attention to what are seen as the basic skills of reading and writing. There has been some rather begrudging recognition of the need to improve the technical training and accreditation, and broader education, of the sixteen-plus age group. But, in so far as attention has been given to the question of moral and cultural education within the new market society, the tendency has been to fall back, as if by rote, on 'the importance of the family' as *the* site for such an education. It is by no means clear what the family, which is in any case a much more fractured and diffuse institution than most conventional discussion wants to allow, is actually supposed to be saying, over and above reciting the classic bourgeois virtues of self-discipline and deferred gratification, on the one hand, and 'voluntary efforts' in the community, on the other.<sup>45</sup>

Nor is it clear why these kinds of appeals should have any purchase on the two 'fractions' of the dislocated working class we have tried to identify here or, indeed, what their likely beneficial effects might be. The truth is that there is very little in the theoretical work underpinning the current, worldwide shift towards competitive free market societies, which speaks to the problem of general moral education—or, indeed, of education for life as a *citizen*, living in the *public sphere* of civil society (as distinct from the essentially privatized life of the individual entrepreneur). It is precisely for this reason that the reflections of Mr Rogan Taylor, Chairman of the English Supporters' Club Association, in the immediate aftermath of Hillsborough, pleading for changes in the ways in which supporters relate to each other seem over-idealistic.

## 6. Hillsborough and the Disaster Theme

I have already noted the desire of some commentators, both within Britain and abroad, to offer an implicit, explanatory link between the

---

<sup>45</sup> Two succinct and typical examples of this position are to be found in Douglas Hurd's 'Tamworth Manifesto', *New Statesman*, 17 March 1988, p. 7 and his 'Citizenship in the New Tory Democracy', *New Statesman*, 29 April 1988, pp. 14–15.

events at the Heysel Stadium and the Hillsborough disaster.<sup>46</sup> It hardly needs saying that these 'discursive connections' between Heysel and Hillsborough are ideological in at least one important sense.

Plastered all over the walls of Britain's inner-city shopping areas, as I write, is a poster put out by the Socialist Workers Party, organized around the now famous photograph of a Liverpool fan sitting alone and distraught among the mangled perimeter fences at the front of Hillsborough's Leppings Lane terrace. Underneath this photo is the caption 'Thatcherism: Ten Years of Disasters' (and, of course, a call to various political meetings). There is no need, I think, to subscribe to the kind of simplistic causal theories associated with the SWP to recognize the strength of the empirical claim which this poster attempts to represent. This is a society which since 1979 has experienced a series of inner-city riots quite without precedent in their violence and intensity, but which has also, perhaps more tellingly, experienced disastrous breakdowns in the efficacy of public provisions on the part of established institutions purporting to provide for, or, indeed, to 'look after' the citizenry. The list of such disasters now includes the Bradford City fire (57 deaths by incineration in May 1985), the sinking of the 'Herald of Free Enterprise' ferry in Zeebrugge Harbour in 1987 (188 British passengers drowned), the fire in King's Cross Underground Station in November 1987 (31 incinerated), the explosion on the Piper Alpha oil rig in July 1988 (167 oil workers blown up or drowned), and the Southern Region rail crashes at Clapham Junction in December 1988 (35 dead) and then at Purley (2 dead, 52 injured) in March 1989. To this 'litany' of disasters, some observers would add the deaths by fire of 55 holidaymakers in a British Airways plane awaiting take-off at Manchester Airport in August 1985, the Lockerbie disaster in December 1988 and the East Midlands Airport disaster just three weeks later in January 1989. There has been nothing to approach these disasters in Britain, either in scale or in public impact, since Aberfan, on 22 October 1966, when a landslide from a pitheap engulfed a local school and claimed the lives of 147, the vast majority of them infants.

Although some commentators have denied that there is a pattern to these disasters, this is certainly not how they are experienced in popular consciousness, nor how they are viewed by safety engineers and by informed commentators in the mass media. A report by the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, for example, quotes the head of safety engineering at Cranford Institute of Technology as saying that 'what seems to be happening is that safety is judged by the amount of money that people want to spend (and) at this point in time, we are in an environment where money has become very, very important.'<sup>47</sup> This Canadian journalist, examining the record, concludes: 'Sifting through the public inquiries of tragedy after tragedy, common themes can be easily unearthed: rampant disregard for safety in private and public services;

---

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Peter Marshall, *op cit* (footnote 29), but also the commentaries in the French and Belgian press (footnote 27) and the remarks of M. Jacques Georges, of the European Football Association.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Greenspan, 'Litany of UK Disasters Linked to Lack of Money', *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 22 April 1989.

poor communications once disasters occur; inadequately trained and overworked staff and, especially, dilapidated public facilities.<sup>48</sup>

Public awareness of the declining condition of public space finds expression in a variety of ways, not least in the continuing high rates of the 'fear of crime'. They are also exhibited in a developing public concern about the extraordinary level of litter which besmirches British streets and public spaces generally. Some, like the *Sunday Times* newspaper, have responded to the problem of litter with special campaigns organized around the inputs of voluntary effort and sponsorship of parks, public spaces or litter bins by business enterprise. Others, like the national *Tidy Britain Group*, have called for enlargement and strict enforcement of the law against litter.

Implicit in all this emerging consciousness regarding the public environment, however, is a theoretical—and, indeed, a socio-political—connection which the existing discourse on Hillsborough did not proclaim. The 'litany' of disasters is, indeed, in the nature of a critique of a society which simply has not taken seriously the question of public safety and public provision. Even in the heyday of post-war reconstruction, social-democratic politicians attempting to build a New Jerusalem (for example, in the form of 'garden cities', or even council houses with space for growing families, shelves for reading matter, and materials adequate to prevent environmental deterioration) were seriously and consistently obstructed, most usually on grounds of cost (no council houses were ever built with shelving). So also was the establishment of the NHS vigorously obstructed by the medical profession and by other powerful private interests.

In more recent post-Keynesian times, public provision, in its most general sense, has come to be equated, in political discourse, with the creation and/or elaboration of a 'nanny state', encouraging the growth of a 'state dependent' mentality among the citizenry in general and the underclass in particular.<sup>49</sup> But what none of these commentators ever discusses is the condition of public space (or, for that matter, of public life—whether in the form of interpersonal concern or conviviality) in a free market society. What possible guarantee is there, in a *competitive free market society*, of safer public spaces, safer public transport and/or a sea-change in the way that 'authority' treats, for example, the consumer, the sports fan or the traveller—that is, the citizen—in Britain?

The fires at Bradford City and at Kings Cross, like the routine vandalism and graffiti on nearly all British housing estates, were the product of a society in which the public's regard for disdainful, uncaring and inefficient public provision was expressed in a littering of the space so provided. The Piper Alpha disaster was a product of a

---

<sup>48</sup> *Globe and Mail*, op. cit. According to a report issued by the Railway Inspectorate in May 1989, the possibility of another catastrophe on London Underground remains; no more than a minimal level of safety management was observable 'in a number of sectors'. *Financial Times*, 24 May 1989.

<sup>49</sup> A good example is the free market convert Brian Walden, 'Of Al Capone, and Other Responsible Individuals', *Sunday Times*, 28 May 1989.

society in which a sudden and continuing demand for oil has vastly outstripped any serious concern for worker safety.<sup>27</sup> The Southern Region rail disasters were a product of a society in which rail travel is increasingly underfunded (and whose equipment is therefore massively outdated and its staff callously overworked), and in which the Government is theologically committed, against nearly all environmental and economic evidence, to an expansion of the road system rather than of public transport systems. The Zeebrugge disaster, in a more complicated way, seems to have stemmed from a disastrous individual oversight, but was clearly an expression of a kind of careless inefficiency and neglect for the public interest which characterizes the British service industry in general.

For free marketeers, all of this can simply be dealt with by market forces; in theory, the consumers of such dangerous or disdainful service should turn elsewhere and a modern (i.e. free market) society then emerge. But the truth surely is that the British consuming citizen (the free agent of market theory) does *not* seem to walk away from public provisions simply because they are inefficient or even potentially dangerous. He or she certainly gets angry and frustrated but observation suggests that, for many British citizens, the 'idea' of public life and of public provision is important in and of itself; public provision has to do, in some important sense, with the idea that this could still be a civilized culture, displaying a shared public experience with respect to health issues, transport, education, sport, and even public, political debate. (It also needs to be said, of course, that for many of the poor in Britain there really is no available alternative to public provision in health, education, transport and sport.) This is *not* a notion of a public's dependency on the state, but it is a notion of the state as a site for the negotiation or realization of a larger public involvement and 'fellow-feeling' in the messy business of everyday life.

I want to tie these contemplations together, and return to the tragic event at Hillsborough on 15 April. Just as there is a direct line of 'causality' between Bradford City and the Kings Cross Underground fires (the *careless* discarding of litter, and the failure of private *and* public authority, and the workers employed by them, to clear that litter on the public's behalf and in the interests of their safety), so also there is a clear line of causality between the penal policies of a Government which focuses on 'securely containing' the most criminally-involved of its underclass and the 'practical measures' taken by football authorities, with the support of Government, in a 'law and order' approach to the problem of soccer violence—by separating the underclass into cages. What Hillsborough represents (in this respect, like Kings Cross and the other disasters in public, i.e. social, space) is the end-point of a period of experiment in which, as the Prime Minister herself once insistently suggested, there is no such thing as 'the social'.

---

<sup>27</sup> See, *inter alia*, W.G. Carson, *The Other Price of Britain's Oil*, London 1981, and the chapter on 'The Political Economy of Speed'.



## *'The Poetry of the Past': Marx and the French Revolution*

Like so many German intellectuals of his generation, Marx was literally *fascinated* by the French Revolution: in his eyes it was quite simply the Revolution par excellence or, more precisely, 'the most colossal revolution that history has ever known'.<sup>1</sup> We know that in 1844 he was intending to write a book on the French Revolution, beginning with the history of the Convention. From 1843 onwards, he had begun to consult works on the subject, to take notes and to research periodicals and document collections. He began with German works (Carl Friedrich Ernst Ludwig, Wilhelm Wachsmuth) but, as time went on, French works came to predominate in his reading—particularly the *Mémoires* of Levasseur, a member of the Convention, extracts from which fill several pages of Marx's Paris notebooks of 1844. Apart from these notebooks (which Maximilien Rubel reproduces in Volume III of the Pléiade French edition of Marx's works), the references cited in his articles and books (particularly during the years 1844–48) provide evidence of the vast bibliography consulted: Buchez and Roux's *L'Histoire parlementaire de la*

*Révolution française*, Louis Blanc's *Histoire de la Révolution française*, the histories of Carlyle, Mignet, Thiers and Cabet and texts by Camille Desmoulins, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Marat, etc. A partial list of this bibliography can be found in Jean Bruhat's article 'Marx et la Révolution française', published in the *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, April-June 1966.

The planned book on the Convention was never written, but we find scattered about Marx's writings throughout his whole lifetime, a number of remarks, analyses, historiographical excursions and interpretative outlines on the French Revolution. These various writings are not all of a piece: we can see changes, reorientations, hesitations and sometimes even contradictions in his reading of the events. But we can also identify certain lines of force which make it possible to define the essence of the phenomenon—lines of force which have inspired socialist historiography for a century and a half.

This definition starts out, as we know, from a critical analysis of the results of the revolutionary process: from this point of view, what Marx was dealing with was, without a shadow of a doubt in his view, a *bourgeois* revolution. This was not, in itself, a new idea: the new step introduced by Marx was the fusing of the Communist critique of the limits of the French Revolution (from Babeuf and Buonarroti to Moses Hess) with the class analysis of the revolution made by the historians of the Restoration period (Mignet, Thiers, Thierry, et al.) and the situating of the whole within the framework of world history thanks to his materialist historical method. The result was a vast and coherent *overall vision* of the French revolutionary landscape, which brought out the *underlying logic* of events, beyond the myriad details, the—heroic or sordid—episodes, and the various retreats and advances. It is a *critical and demystificatory* vision which reveals, behind the smoke of battle and the heady language of the speeches, the victory of a class interest, the interest of the bourgeoisie. As Marx emphasizes in a brilliant and ironic passage in *The Holy Family* (1845) which captures the thread running through this period of history at a single stroke: 'That *interest* was so powerful that it was victorious over the pen of Marat, the guillotine of the Terror and the sword of Napoleon as well as the crucifix and the blue blood of the Bourbons.'<sup>2</sup>

In actual fact, the victory of this class marked, at the same time, the coming of a new civilization, new relations of production and new values (and not just economic values but social and cultural ones as well). In short, it saw the coming of a new way of life. Gathering the historical significance of the revolutions of 1648 and 1789 into one paragraph (though his remarks relate more directly to the latter than to the former), Marx observes, in an article in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848: 'In these revolutions the bourgeoisie gained the victory; but the *victory of the bourgeoisie* was at that time the *victory of a new social order*, the victory of bourgeois property over feudal property, of

<sup>1</sup> K. Marx, *The German Ideology*, Marx-Engels Collected Works, vol. 3, London 1976, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> K. Marx, *The Holy Family*, Marx-Engels Collected Works, vol. 4, London 1973, p. 81.

nationality over provincialism, of competition over the guild, of the partition of estates over primogeniture, of the owner's mastery of the land over the land's mastery of its owner, of enlightenment over superstition, of the family over the family name, of industry over heroic laziness, of civil law over privileges of medieval origin.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, this analysis of the—ultimately—bourgeois character of the French Revolution was not an exercise in academic historiography: it had a precise political objective. In demystifying 1789, its aim was to show the necessity of a *new revolution*, the social revolution—the one Marx spoke of in 1844 as 'human emancipation' (by contrast with merely political emancipation) and in 1846 as the Communist revolution.

One of the main characteristics which would, in Marx's view, distinguish this new revolution from the French Revolution of 1789–94 would be its 'anti-statism', its break with the alienated bureaucratic apparatus of the State. Up to this point, 'All political upheavals perfected this machine instead of smashing it. The parties that strove in turn for mastery regarded possession of this immense state edifice as the main booty for the victor.' Presenting this analysis in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, he observed—in a manner reminiscent of Tocqueville—that the French Revolution had merely 'had to carry further the centralization that the absolute monarchy had begun, but at the same time it had to develop the extent, the attributes and the number of underlings of the governmental power. Napoleon perfected this state machinery'. However, under the absolute monarchy, the Revolution and the First Empire, that apparatus had merely been a means for preparing the domination of the bourgeois class which would be exerted more directly under Louis-Philippe and the Republic of 1848, only to make way, once again, for the autonomy of the political under the Second Empire—when the State *seemed* to have made itself 'completely independent'. In other words, the state apparatus served the class interests of the bourgeoisie without necessarily being under its direct control. The fact that it did not engage with the basis of this parasitic, alienated 'machine' was, in Marx's view, one of the most crucial *bourgeois limitations* of the French Revolution. As we know, this idea, which Marx sketched out in 1852, would be developed in 1871 in his writings on the Commune, the first example of a proletarian revolution which smashed the state apparatus and put an end to that 'boa constrictor' which 'grips the social body in the inescapable meshes of its bureaucracy, its police and its standing army'. By its bourgeois character, the French Revolution could not emancipate society from that 'parasitic excrescence', that 'swarm of State vermin', that 'enormous governmental parasite'.<sup>4</sup>

### The 'Breadth of Soul' of the Bourgeoisie

The recent attempts by revisionist historians to 'go beyond' the

---

<sup>3</sup> K. Marx, 'The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution', in D. Fernbach, ed., *The Revolutions of 1848*, Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 192–3.

<sup>4</sup> K. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', in D. Fernbach, ed., *Surveys from Exile*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 237; K. Marx, 'The Civil War in France', first and second versions, quoted from K. Marx, F. Engels, *Sur la Révolution française* (ed. Claude Maingrot), Paris 1983, pp. 187–192.

Marxian analysis have generally ended in a regression to older liberal or speculative interpretations, thus confirming Sartre's profound observation that Marxism is the ultimate possible horizon of our age and that attempts to go beyond Marx frequently end up *falling short* of him. We may illustrate this paradox by examining the procedure adopted by the most talented and intelligent member of this school, François Furet, who can find no other way to pass beyond Marx than to return to Hegel. According to Furet, 'Hegelian idealism is infinitely more concerned than Marx's materialism with the concrete facts of the history of France in the eighteenth century.' What then are these 'concrete facts' that are infinitely more important than relations of production and the class struggle? The answer is 'the long labour of Spirit in history'. Thanks to this—Spirit with a capital S—we are at last able to understand the true nature of the French Revolution: rather than the triumph of a social class, the bourgeoisie, it is the 'affirmation of self-consciousness as free will, which is co-extensive with the universal, transparent to itself and reconciled with being'. This Hegelian reading of the events leads Furet to the curious conclusion that the French Revolution ended in a 'failure', the cause of which is to be found in an 'error', the desire 'to deduce the political from the social'. The man responsible for that 'failure', in the last analysis, is said to be Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's error and that of the French Revolution lay in the attempt to affirm the 'precedence of the social over the State'. Hegel, by contrast, fully understood that 'it is only through the State—that superior historical form—that society can be organized according to reason'. The French Revolution failed and the fault was Rousseau's: this is one possible interpretation of the events, but is it really 'infinitely more concrete' than the one outlined by Marx?

We still have to ask, however, to what extent this bourgeois revolution was actually led, impelled forward and directed by the bourgeoisie. In certain of Marx's texts, he positively sings the praises of the revolutionary French bourgeoisie of 1789; in almost every case, he does so in writings in which he is comparing it with its social counterpart across the Rhine, the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie.

From 1844 onwards, Marx begins to lament the non-existence in Germany of a bourgeois class which possesses 'that breadth of soul which identifies it, if only for a moment, with the soul of the people; that genius which animates material force into political power, that revolutionary boldness which flings at its adversary the defiant phrase: I am nothing and I should be everything.'<sup>5</sup> In the articles he published during the revolution of 1848, he continually denounced the 'weakness' and 'treachery' of the German bourgeoisie, contrasting it with the glorious French paradigm: 'The Prussian bourgeoisie was not, like

<sup>5</sup> F. Furet, *Marx et la Révolution française*, Paris 1986, pp. 81–84. Cf. p. 83: 'However, in order to affirm the abstract universality of freedom, the Revolution had to proceed by splitting civil society from the State and by deducing, so to speak, the political from the social. That was its error and its failure, just as it was the failure of the theories of contract, particularly that of Rousseau.'

<sup>6</sup> K. Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Rights'*, Cambridge 1970, p. 140.

the French bourgeoisie of 1789, the class which represented the *whole* of modern society in face of the representatives of the old society, the monarchy and the nobility. It had sunk to the level of a type of *estate* ... inclined from the outset to treachery against the people and compromise with the crowned representative of the old society.<sup>7</sup> In another article in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (July 1848), he examined this contrast in more detail.

The French bourgeoisie of 1789 did not leave its allies the peasants in the lurch for one moment. It knew that the basis of its rule was the destruction of feudalism on the land and the establishment of a class of free peasant landowners.

The German bourgeoisie of 1848 does not hesitate to betray the peasants who are its *natural allies*, its own flesh and blood, and without the peasants this bourgeoisie is powerless against the nobility.<sup>8</sup>

This celebration of the revolutionary virtues of the French bourgeoisie would later inspire linear and mechanistic visions of historical progress in certain currents within Marxism (especially in the twentieth century). We shall return to this below.

Reading these texts, one often gets the impression that Marx only extolled the virtues of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of 1789 the more effectively to stigmatize the 'misbegotten' German version of 1848. This impression is confirmed by writings from the years preceding 1848, in which the role of the French bourgeoisie appears much less heroic. In *The German Ideology*, for example, commenting on the decision of the Estates General to proclaim itself a sovereign assembly, he observed: 'The National Assembly had to take this step because it was being urged forward by the immense mass of the people that stood behind it.'<sup>9</sup> And in an article of 1847, writing of the abolition of the vestiges of feudalism in 1789-94, he stated: 'The timidly considerate bourgeoisie would not have accomplished this task in decades. The bloody action of the people thus only prepared the way for it.'<sup>10</sup>

### Understanding the Terror

If Marx's analysis of the bourgeois character of the revolution is remarkably clear and coherent, the same cannot be said of his attempts to interpret Jacobinism and the Terror of 1793. Confronted with the mystery of Jacobinism, Marx hesitates. This hesitation is visible in the variations from one period to another, from one text to another, and sometimes within the same document. Not all the hypotheses he advances are of the same interest. Some of them, which are quite extreme—and, moreover, mutually contradictory—are not particularly convincing. For example, in a passage in *The German Ideology*, he presents the Terror as the implementation of the 'vigorous liberalism

<sup>7</sup> 'The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution', pp. 193-4.

<sup>8</sup> 'The Bill for the Abolition of Feudal Burdens', *The Revolutions of 1848*, p. 143.

<sup>9</sup> *The German Ideology*, p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> K. Marx, 'Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality. A Contribution to German Cultural History. Contra Karl Heinzen', *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, London 1976, p. 319.

of the bourgeoisie! A few pages earlier, however, Robespierre and Saint-Just are defined as the 'real representatives of revolutionary power, i.e. of the class which *alone* was truly revolutionary, the "innumerable" mass'.<sup>11</sup>

This last hypothesis is suggested once again in a passage in the 1847 article against Karl Heinzen: if, 'as in 1794', 'the proletariat overthrows the political domination of the bourgeoisie' before the material conditions for its power are present, its victory 'will only be transient' and will, in the end, only assist the bourgeois revolution itself.<sup>12</sup> The formulation is indirect and the reference to the French Revolution is only made in passing, in relation to a contemporary political debate, but it is nonetheless surprising to find that Marx was able to see the events of 1794 as representing a 'victory of the proletariat'.

Other interpretations in these writings are more pertinent and may be regarded as mutually complementary.

(1) The Terror is a moment in which the political becomes autonomous and then comes into violent conflict with bourgeois society. The *locus classicus* of this hypothesis is a passage in *The Jewish Question* (1844).

Of course, in periods when the political state as such is born violently out of civil society . . . the state can and must go as far as the *abolition of religion*. . . . But it can do so only in the same way that it proceeds to the abolition of private property, to the maximum, to confiscation, to progressive taxation, just as it goes as far as the abolition of life, the *guillotine*. . . . political life seeks to suppress its prerequisite, civil society and the elements composing this society, and to constitute itself as the real species-life of man devoid of contradictions. But it can achieve this only by coming into *violent* contradiction with its own conditions of life, only by declaring the revolution to be *permanent*, and therefore the political drama necessarily ends with the re-establishment of religion, private property, and all elements of civil society. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Seen in this light, Jacobinism seems to be a vain and necessarily abortive attempt to confront bourgeois society in a strictly political manner *by the use of the state*.

(2) The men of the Terror—'Robespierre, Saint-Just and their party'—were victims of an illusion: they confused the ancient Roman Republic with the modern representative State. Caught up in an insoluble contradiction, they sought to sacrifice bourgeois society 'to an ancient mode of political life'. This idea, which is developed in *The Holy Family* (1845), implies, as does the previous hypothesis, both an exacerbation and an autonomization of the political sphere in this period of history. It leads to the somewhat surprising conclusion that Napoleon was the heir to Jacobinism: he represented: 'the last battle of *revolutionary terror* against the bourgeois society, which had been

<sup>11</sup> *The German Ideology*, p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> 'Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality', p. 319.

<sup>13</sup> K. Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, London 1975, pp. 135–136.

proclaimed by this same Revolution, and against its policy'. Admittedly, he was 'no terrorist with his head in the clouds'; nonetheless, 'he still regarded the *state* as an *end in itself* and civil life only as a treasurer and his *subordinates* which must have no *will of its own*. He *perfected the Terror* by substituting permanent war for permanent revolution.'<sup>14</sup>

We find the same thesis again in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1852), but this time Marx stressed the 'ruse of reason' which made the Jacobins (and Bonaparte) the midwives of that same bourgeois society which they scorned.

Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just and Napoleon, the heroes of the old French Revolution, as well as its parties and masses, accomplished the task of their epoch, which was the emancipation and establishment of modern *bourgeois* society, in Roman costume and with Roman slogans. . . . Once the new social formation had been established, the antediluvian colossi disappeared along with the resurrected imitations of Rome—imitations of Brutus, Gracchus, Publicola, the tribunes, the senators and Caesar himself. Bourgeois society in its sober reality had created its true interpreters and spokesmen in such people as Say, Cousin, Royer-Collard, Benjamin Constant and Guizot.<sup>15</sup>

Robespierre and Napoleon fighting the same battle? The formula is a questionable one. It had already been seen from liberals like Mme de Staël, who described Bonaparte as 'a Robespierre on horseback'. At least from Marx's pen, this formula shows a rejection of any idea that there was a direct line of descent leading from Jacobinism to Socialism. One gets the impression, however, that this derives less from a critique of Jacobinism (as in the work of Daniel Guérin a century later) than from a certain 'idealization' of the man of the 18th Brumaire, considered by Marx—in keeping with a tradition of the Rhenish Left (for example, Heinrich Heine)—as having continued the work of the French Revolution.

(3) The Terror was a plebeian method of doing away with the last vestiges of feudalism in a radical way and, in this sense, it played a functional role in the emergence of bourgeois society. This hypothesis is suggested in several texts, particularly in the article, 'The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution' of 1848. Analysing the behaviour of the urban popular strata ('the proletariat, and the other sections of the town population which did not form a part of the bourgeoisie'), Marx states: '... where they stood in opposition to the bourgeoisie, as for example in 1793 and 1794 in France, they were in fact fighting for the implementation of the interests of the bourgeoisie, although not *in the manner* of the bourgeoisie. The *whole of the French terror* was nothing other than a *plebeian manner* of dealing with the *enemies of the bourgeoisie*, with absolutism, feudalism and parochialism.'<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *The Holy Family*, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution', p. 192. Cf. also the article of 1847 against Karl Heinzen: 'The terror in France could thus by its mighty hammer-blows only serve to spirit away, as it were, the ruins of feudalism from French soil. The timidly considerate bourgeoisie would not have accomplished this task in decades' ('Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality', p. 319).

## Class and the Jacobins

The clear advantage of this analysis was that it integrated the events of 1793–4 into the overall logic of the French Revolution—the emergence of bourgeois society. Using the dialectical method, Marx showed that the 'anti-bourgeois' aspects of the Terror only served, in the last analysis, the better to ensure the social and political triumph of the bourgeoisie.

The three aspects brought out here by these three lines of interpretation of Jacobinism—the hypertrophy of the political sphere in conflict with bourgeois society, the illusion of returning to the Republic of antiquity, and the role of plebeian instrument serving the objective interests of the bourgeoisie—are entirely compatible and allow us to grasp different facets of the historical reality.

Two aspects of this are, however, striking: on the one hand, there is the rather excessive importance Marx attributes to the 'Roman illusion' as a key to the explanation of the Jacobins' behaviour. And this is all the more surprising in that it is one of the exigencies of historical materialism that ideologies and illusions be explained in terms of the position and interests of social classes. Yet there is in the work of Marx (and Engels) no even approximate attempt to define the *class nature* of Jacobinism. There is no shortage of class analysis in Marx's writings on the French Revolution: the roles of the aristocracy, the clergy, the bourgeoisie, the peasants, the urban plebs and even the 'proletariat' (a somewhat anachronistic term in eighteenth-century France) all come under review. But Jacobinism remains hanging in the air, consigned to the celestial realm of the politics of 'antiquity'—or else associated, somewhat hastily, with the whole set of non-bourgeois, plebeian strata.

Though in his works on the revolution of 1848–52, Marx did not hesitate to characterize the modern heirs of the *Montagne* as *petty-bourgeois democrats*, only very seldom did he extend that social definition to the Jacobins of 1793. One of the only passages in which that is even hinted at is to be found in the 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League (March 1850)': 'As in the first French Revolution, the petty bourgeoisie will want to give the feudal lands to the peasants as free property; that is, they will try to perpetuate the existence of the rural proletariat, and to form a petty-bourgeois peasant class which will be subject to the same cycle of impoverishment and debt which still afflicts the French peasant.'<sup>17</sup> But this once again is a remark made 'in passing', in which the Jacobins are not even referred to by name. It is a curious fact, but there are very few elements in Marx's work (or that of Engels) for a class analysis of the contradictions of Jacobinism—like, for example, that of Daniel Guérin, for whom the Jacobin party was 'at once petty-bourgeois at its head and popular at its base'.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League (March 1850)', *The Revolutions of 1848*, pp. 327–8.

<sup>18</sup> D. Guérin, *La Lutte de classes sous la Première République Bourgeoise et 'bras nus' 1793–1797*, Paris 1946, p. 12.



In any case, one thing is clear: for Marx, 1793 *was by no means a paradigm for the future proletarian revolution*. Whatever his admiration for the historical greatness and revolutionary energy of a Robespierre or a Saint-Just, Jacobinism is explicitly rejected as a model or source of inspiration for socialist revolutionary praxis. This is clear from the first Communist texts of 1844 which distinguish the goals of social emancipation from the impasse and illusions of the political voluntarism of the men of the Terror. But it was during the years 1848–52, in his writings on France, that Marx most emphatically denounced the 'traditional superstition in 1793', the 'pedants of the old tradition of 1793', the 'illusions of the republicans of the tradition of 1793' and all those who 'are intoxicated by the opium of the sentiments and the "patriotic" formulas of 1793'. Such reasoning led him to the celebrated conclusion formulated in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*: 'The social revolution of the nineteenth century can only create its poetry from the future, not from the past. It cannot begin its own work until it has sloughed off all its superstitious regard for the past.'<sup>19</sup> This is a highly questionable affirmation—the Commune of 1793 inspired that of 1871, and that, in its turn, fed into October 1917—but it bears witness to the hostility Marx showed against any resurgence of Jacobinism within the proletarian movement.

This in no way means that Marx did not see personalities, groups and movements in the French Revolution that were forerunners of socialism. In a very well-known passage from *The Holy Family* (1845) he rapidly runs through the chief representatives of that tendency: 'The revolutionary movement which began in 1789 in the *Cercle social*, which in the middle of its course had as its chief representatives *Laclos* and *Roux*, and which finally with *Babeuf's* conspiracy was temporarily defeated, gave rise to the communist idea which *Babeuf's* friend *Bonaparte* re-introduced in France after the Revolution of 1830. This idea, consistently developed, is the *idea* of the *new world order*.'<sup>20</sup>

Curiously, Marx only seemed interested in the *idea* of communism and paid little attention to social developments, to the *class struggle* within the Third Estate. Moreover, in his later writings he continued to show scant interest in these 'germs of communism' within the French Revolution (with the exception of Babeuf) and never attempted to study the class conflicts between bourgeois and *bras nus* in the course of the Revolution. In Engels' last writings (in 1889), we find a few hasty references to the conflict between the Commune (Hébert, Chaumette) and the Committee of Public Safety (Robespierre), but there is no mention of the *enragé* tendency represented by Jacques Roux.<sup>21</sup>

Amongst the figures who might be seen as precursors, *Babeuf* was thus the only one who seemed really important to Marx and Engels, who referred to him on several occasions. For example in the article against

<sup>19</sup> 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', p. 149.

<sup>20</sup> *The Holy Family*, p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Engels to Karl Kautsky, 20/2/89, quoted in Marx, Engels *Sur la Révolution française*, Paris 1895.

Heinzen (1847), Marx observed: 'The first manifestation of a truly active communist party is contained within the bourgeois revolution, at the moment when the constitutional monarchy is eliminated. The most consistent *republicans*, in England, the *Levellers*, in France, *Babeuf*, *Buonarroti*, etc. were the first to proclaim these "social questions". *The Babeuf Conspiracy* by Babeuf's friend and party-comrade Buonarroti, shows how these republicans derived from the "movement" of history the realization that the disposal of the social question of *rule by princes* and *republic* did not mean that even a single "social question" has been solved in the interests of the proletariat.'<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the sentence in the *Communist Manifesto* which describes 'the first direct attempts of the proletariat to attain its own ends', which occurred during the period 'when feudal society was being overthrown', also refers to Babeuf (explicitly mentioned in this context).<sup>23</sup> This interest is understandable insofar as several of the communist currents in France before 1848 were more or less directly inspired by Babouvism. But the question of the *anti-bourgeois* popular movements (*sans-culottes*) of the years 1793-94, which were more advanced than the Jacobins, is barely touched upon by Marx or Engels.

### Beyond the Bourgeois Revolution

In these circumstances, may we then say that Marx perceived in the French Revolution not only the bourgeois revolution but also a *dynamic of permanent revolution*, an embryo of 'proletarian' revolution bursting through the strictly bourgeois framework? The answer must be both that he did and he did not.

It is true, as we have seen above, that Marx used the term 'permanent revolution' in 1843-44 to characterize the politics of the Terror. Daniel Guérin interprets this formula as being consonant with his own interpretation of the French Revolution: 'Marx used the expression "permanent revolution" in relation to the French Revolution. He showed that the revolutionary movement in 1793 attempted, for a moment, to go beyond the bounds of the bourgeois revolution.'<sup>24</sup> However, the sense in which Marx used the expression (in 'On the Jewish Question') was not at all identical with the sense given to it by Guérin: 'permanent revolution' did not at this point signify a semi-proletarian *social movement* seeking to develop the class struggle against the bourgeoisie by outflanking the Jacobin government, but a vain attempt by '*political life*' (embodied in the Jacobins) to emancipate itself from civil/bourgeois society and to abolish this latter using the guillotine. The comparison Marx sketched out a year later (in *The Holy Family*) between Robespierre and Napoleon, in which the latter is seen as having perfected 'the Terror by *substituting permanent war for permanent revolution*', well illustrates the distance between this formula and the idea of the seeds of proletarian revolution.

<sup>22</sup> 'Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality', p. 321.

<sup>23</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, 'Manifesto of The Communist Party', *The Revolutions of 1848*, p. 94.

<sup>24</sup> Guérin, p. 7.

The other example Guérin cites is an article from January 1849 in which Engels refers to 'permanent revolution' as one of the characteristic features of the 'glorious year 1793'. In that article, however, Engels mentions as a contemporary example of this 'permanent revolution' the Hungarian national-popular rising of 1848 led by Lajos Kossuth 'who for his nation is Danton and Carnot rolled into one'. It is clear that for Engels this term was simply synonymous with the revolutionary mobilization of the people and in no way had the sense of the Revolution growing over into a socialist one.<sup>25</sup>

These remarks are not intended to be a criticism of Daniel Guérin, but, rather, to throw into relief the profound *originality* of his approach: he did not simply develop the indications already present in Marx and Engels, but, using the Marxist method, he formulated a new interpretation which brings out the 'permanentist' dynamic of the revolutionary movement of the *bras nus* of 1793-4.

Having said this, there is no doubt that the expression 'permanent revolution' is closely associated, in Marx (and in Engels) with memories of the French Revolution. This connection exists on three levels: (1) The immediate origin of the formula probably goes back to the fact that the revolutionary clubs often declared that they were assembled '*en permanence*'. Moreover, this expression appeared in one of the German books on the Revolution which Marx had read in 1843-44.<sup>26</sup> (2) The expression also implies the idea of an uninterrupted advance of the Revolution, from absolute to constitutional monarchy, from the Girondin to the Jacobin republic, etc. (3) In the context of the articles of 1843-44, it suggests a tendency within political revolution (in its Jacobin form) to become an end in itself and to come into conflict with civil/bourgeois society.

By contrast, the *idea* of permanent revolution in its strong sense—that of revolutionary Marxism in the twentieth century—appeared in Marx for the first time in 1844, and it did so *in relation to Germany*. In the article, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"', he registered the German bourgeoisie's inability to fulfil its revolutionary role: at the moment when it begins its struggle against the monarchy and the nobility, 'the proletariat is already beginning its struggle against the bourgeoisie. The middle class hardly dares to conceive of the idea of emancipation from its own point of view, and already the development of social conditions and the progress of political theory show that this point of view itself is antiquated, or at least questionable.' It follows that in Germany, 'it is not *radical* revolution, *universally human* emancipation which is... a utopian dream; it is, rather, partial revolution, *purely political* revolution, the revolution which leaves the pillars of the old house standing'. In other words, 'In France, partial emancipation is the basis of universal emancipation. In Germany, universal emancipation is the *conditio sine qua non* for any

<sup>25</sup> Guérin, p. 7, F. Engels, 'The Magyar Struggle', *The Revolutions of 1848*, p. 213.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. W. Wachsmuth, *Geschichte Frankreichs im Revolutionsalter*, Hamburg 1842, vol. 2, p. 341. 'Von den Jakobinern ging die Nachricht ein, dass sie in Permanenz erklärt hatten'.

partial emancipation.<sup>27</sup> It was therefore in opposition to the 'purely political', 'partial' model of the French Revolution that the idea emerged—in a language as yet philosophical—that, in certain countries, the socialist revolution would have to accomplish the historical tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

Only in March 1850, in the 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League', did Marx and Engels *fuse the French expression with the German idea, the formula inspired by the Revolution of 1789–94 with the perspective of developing the (German) democratic revolution into a proletarian one*: 'While the democratic petty-bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible . . . it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power' . . . in all the leading countries of the world and 'the decisive forces of production' are concentrated in its hands.<sup>28</sup> Here 'permanent revolution' first takes on the meaning it will have in the twentieth century (most notably in the writings of Trotsky). In its new sense, what the formula retains of its origins in the historical context of the French Revolution is chiefly the second aspect mentioned above: the idea of a progression, radicalization and uninterrupted enriching of the revolution. We also find in it the aspect of confrontation with civil/bourgeois society, but contrary to the Jacobin model of 1793, this confrontation is no longer the terrorist action of the political sphere as such (which is necessarily doomed to failure)—trying in vain to attack private property through the guillotine—but *comes from within civil society itself* in the form of (proletarian) *social revolution*.

### The Incomplete Revolution

What then is the heritage of the French Revolution for twentieth-century Marxism? As we have seen, Marx believed that the socialist proletariat should divest itself of the revolutionary tradition of the eighteenth century. It seems to me that Marx was both right and wrong at the same time here. *He was right* insofar as Marxists, throughout the twentieth century, have often sought inspiration in the paradigm of the French Revolution, with relatively negative results. This was the case, first of all, with Russian Marxism in its two major branches:

(1) Plekhanov and the Mensheviks—who thought the Russian democratic bourgeoisie was going to play the same role in the struggle against Czarism as the French bourgeoisie played (according to Marx) in the Revolution of 1789. From that point on, the concept of 'revolutionary bourgeoisie' entered the vocabulary of Marxists and became a key element in elaboration of political strategies, ignoring Marx's warning—in relation to Germany (but with more general implications)—that those bourgeoisies which arrived too late (i.e. which were already threatened by the proletariat) would be incapable of a coherent

<sup>27</sup> K. Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Rights'*, Cambridge 1970, p. 141.

<sup>28</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, 'Address of the Central Committee', pp. 323–4.

revolutionary practice. Admittedly, thanks to Stalinism, the dogma of the democratic/revolutionary (or national) bourgeoisie and the idea of a repetition—in new conditions—of the paradigm of 1789 have been an essential component of the ideology of the Communist movement in colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries since 1926—with baneful consequences for the dominated classes.

(2) Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who, for their part, had no illusions about the Russian liberal bourgeoisie, but who, particularly before 1905, took *Jacobinism* as their political model. The result of this was an often authoritarian conception of the party, revolution and revolutionary power. Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky criticized this Jacobin paradigm—especially during the years 1903–05—by stressing the essential difference between the spirit, methods, practices and organizational forms of Marxism and those of Robespierre and his friends. Lenin's *State and Revolution* may be considered as a move beyond this Jacobin model.

To speak of Stalin and his acolytes as the heirs of Jacobinism would be too unfair to the revolutionaries of 1793, and it would be an obvious historical absurdity to compare the Committee of Public Safety's Terror with that of the GPU in the 1930s. On the other hand, one can detect the presence of a Jacobin element in the work of a Marxist as subtle and innovative as Antonio Gramsci. Though in his articles for *Ordine Nuovo* in 1919, he proclaimed that the proletarian party must not be 'a party which makes use of the masses for its own heroic attempts to imitate the French Jacobins', in his *Prison Notebooks* of the 1930s we find a relatively authoritarian vision of the vanguard party, which is presented as the legitimate heir to the tradition of Machiavelli and the Jacobins.

At another level, however, it seems to me that Marx *was wrong* to deny the revolutionary tradition of 1789–94 any value for the socialist struggle. His own thinking provides an excellent example here: the very idea of *revolution* in his writings (and those of Engels), as an insurrectional movement of the dominated classes overthrowing an oppressive state and an unjust social order, was in very large measure inspired by this tradition. More generally, the French Revolution is part of the *collective memory* of the working people—in France, Europe and throughout the globe—and constitutes a vital source of socialist thinking in all its variants (communism and anarchism included). Contrary to what Marx wrote in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, without 'poetry from the past', there can be no dream of the future.

In a certain sense, the legacy of the French Revolution remains, even today, something living, contemporary and *active*. It still has something incomplete about it. It contains a promise that is not yet fulfilled; it is the beginning of a process which is not yet ended. The best proof of this can be seen in the insistent attempts, beginning with Napoleon himself on 18th Brumaire, to 'put an end', officially and definitively, to the French Revolution. And yet who today would form the bizarre idea of declaring the English Revolution of 1648 ended? Or the American Revolution of 1778? Or the French Revolution of 1830?

If such passionate efforts are still being devoted to the Revolution of 1789–94, it is precisely because that revolution is far from 'ended'. In other words, it continues to have effects in the political field and in cultural life, in the social imaginary and ideological struggles (in France and elsewhere).

What are the aspects of this struggle that are most worthy of interest? Who are the 'spirits of the past' who deserve mention two hundred years after the event? What are the elements of the revolutionary tradition of 1789–94 which most profoundly bear witness to this *state of incompleteness*? I shall here mention four of the most important.

(1) The French Revolution was a crucial moment in the constitution of the oppressed people—the 'innumerable mass' (Marx) of the exploited—as *historical subject*, as actor in its own liberation. In this sense, it was a giant step in what Ernst Bloch calls the '*upright carriage*' of *humanity*—a historical process which is still far from ended. Certainly, precedents can be found in earlier movements (the Peasant Wars of the sixteenth century, The English Revolution in the seventeenth), but none attained the lucidity, the political and moral force, the universal vocation and spiritual boldness of the Revolution of 1789–94, which was, up to that point, the most 'colossal' of all.

(2) In the course of the French Revolution, social movements appeared with aspirations which went beyond the bourgeois limits of the process initiated in 1789. The chief forces of that movement—the *bras nus*, the Republican women, the *enragés*, the *deux* and their representatives (Jacques Roux, Leclerc, etc.)—were defeated, crushed, guillotined. Their memory, systematically repressed by official history, is part of the *tradition of the oppressed* of which Walter Benjamin used to speak, the tradition of the martyred ancestors which feeds the struggles of today. The works of Daniel Guérin and Maurice Dommanget—two 'marginals' from outside academic historiography—have rescued the *bras nus* and the *enragés* from oblivion, whilst more recent research is gradually discovering what richness is to be found among the 'hidden half' of the revolutionary people—the women.

(3) The French Revolution gave birth to conceptions of a 'new world order', the ideas of communism (the 'Cercle social', Babeuf, Sylvain Maréchal, François Bossel, etc.) and feminism (Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt). The revolutionary explosion unleashed dreams, images of desire and radical social demands. In this sense, too, it still carries within it a future which remains open and as yet unachieved.

(4) The ideals of the French Revolution—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, the Rights of Man (particularly in the 1793 version), the sovereignty of the people—contain a *utopian surplus* (Ernst Bloch) which exceeds the uses to which they were put by the bourgeoisie. *Their effective realization demands the abolition of the bourgeois order.*

The conclusion and moral of the story (and of History with a capital H): the French Revolution of 1789–94 was just a beginning. The struggle continues . . .

Terry Eagleton

## Saint Oscar: a Foreword

I first thought of writing about Oscar Wilde when I discovered that hardly any of the Oxford students who asked to study him with me realized that he was Irish.\* Since Wilde himself realized this only fitfully, this is hardly a grievous crime, though it might be said to be evidence of one. English students of literature would know of course that Yeats and Joyce were Irish, and probably—thinking of those tasty babies of *A Modest Proposal*—Jonathan Swift; but it is more doubtful that they could name the nationality of Sterne, Sheridan, Goldsmith and Burke, and they might even hesitate over Bernard Shaw. British cultural imperialism has long annexed these gifted off-shore islanders to its own literary canon, and of course Wilde himself was in many ways glad enough to be recruited. Yet several of the characteristics which make him appear most typically upper-class English—the scorn for bourgeois normality, the flamboyant self-display, the verbal *brio* and iconoclasm—are also, interestingly enough, where one might claim he is most distinctively Irish; and pondering this odd paradox was one point of origin of this play.

Another such point was my sense of how astonishingly Wilde's work prefigures the insights of contemporary cultural theory. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that such theory, for all its excited air of novelty, represents in some ways little advance on the *fin-de-siècle*. Language as self-referential, truth as a convenient fiction, the human subject as contradictory and 'deconstructed', criticism as a form of 'creative' writing, the body and its pleasures pitted against a pharisaical ideology: in these and several other ways, Oscar Wilde looms up for us more and more as the Irish Roland Barthes. The parallel is not fortuitous: somewhere behind Wilde, as somewhere behind modern literary theory, lurks the gigantic shadow of Friedrich Nietzsche. But for me personally this was more than just an intriguing intellectual conjuncture. I have been professionally engaged with radical cultural theory for some years; but during part of that time I have also been struggling to make sense of my own ambiguous, contradictory identity, as one of Irish working-class provenance now teaching in the very

---

\* *Ed. note* This text was written as the foreword to *Saint Oscar*, a new play by Terry Eagleton published by Field Day Theatre Company, Foyle Arts Centre, Old Foyle College, Lawrence Hill, Derry, N. Ireland. *Saint Oscar*, produced by Trevor Griffiths with the Field Day Company, is touring twenty-two venues in Northern and Southern Ireland between 25 September and 25 November, including the Lyric Players Theatre, Belfast (30 October–4 November) and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (6–11 November).

belly of the beast at Oxford. In the end, this combination of factors proved irresistible. Writing about the Irish Oxfordian socialist proto-deconstructionist Oscar Wilde came after a time to feel more like a necessity than a possibility; and the only problem then was to find an appropriate form. I flirted briefly with the idea of a long critical essay, then decided that it would have to be a play. As Wilde had hi-jacked the artistic forms of the English for his own devious ends, so I would try to turn his own dramatic parodies back on himself, finding some way of reinventing him without, as far as possible, actually quoting him.

As I moved more deeply into this work, I began to discover that the two factors which had triggered my fascination with Wilde—his Irishness, and his remarkable anticipation of some present-day theory—were in fact closely interrelated. I had argued in some previous work that the ideas of several of the leading avant-garde theorists of our own time had to be seen in the context of their socially marginal status, whether as ex-colonials (Jacques Derrida), women (Julia Kristeva) or homosexuals (Barthes, Foucault). It wasn't difficult to see just how this might illuminate Wilde, and to begin to fumble for some of the connections between modernism and colonialism. If, like Wilde, your history has been one of colonial oppression, you are less likely to be enamoured of stable representational forms, which are usually, so to speak, on the side of Caesar. You will find yourself a parodist and parasite, bereft of any imposingly continuous cultural tradition, cobbling one together as you go along. Your writing will tend to set up home with anti-realist fantasy and imaginative extravagance, forced often enough into these modes as poor compensation for a harsh social reality. If the language in which you write is, like Wilde's, the tongue of the colonial oppressor, then it is unlikely that you will avoid an intense verbal self-consciousness; and language will seem to you the one surviving space where you might momentarily be free, wresting a Pyrrhic victory over an inexorably determining history. The colonial subject, pitched into a permanent crisis of identity, will not be overimpressed by the solid, well-rounded characters of classical literary realism, but will feel itself fluid, diffuse, provisional; and the same sense of provisionality will apply to social forms and conventions, breeding an ironic awareness of their fictive, ungrounded nature. In these as in other ways, there is a secret compact between artistic or theoretical experiment and the experience of colonialism, one still much in evidence today; and Wilde was for me one vital place where this could be explored, more for the sake of my own identity and allegiances than as a purely intellectual problem. He inherits a form of Anglo-Irish writing which is ironic about realism, sportive, satirical and fantastic, ecstatically comic with a dark, sobering subtext, and, in its contradictions and subversive wit, deeply perverse. It is a style of writing to which I find myself spontaneously attracted, whatever inferior version of it I may turn out; and it runs completely against the grain of my intellectual formation as an English academic. I think that my own theoretical work over recent years has represented a long, painful effort to rediscover something of my own voice in this respect, to turn back to forms of writing bred, so to speak, in



the bone; and it is one measure of the awesome power of conventional academic *genres* that in order to be faithful to this impulse I have had to make a break from theoretical to so-called 'creative' writing. What is at one level a question of style is at another level a matter of commitment and identity, a question of slowly discovering that which was 'Irish' in myself but had been suppressed by my formal English education. Examining the doubleness of Oscar Wilde, Oxford dandy and son of the dirtiest man in Dublin, then felt like an unavoidable stage in this self-exploration.

If Wilde is not usually thought of in England as Irish, neither is he seen as a particularly political figure. But Wilde is political in all the most fundamental senses of the term, political in ways which far outstrip the impoverished categories of parliamentary democracy. He was actually politically-minded in some rather sharper, more specific meanings of the word too; he wrote finely about socialism, spoke up for Irish republicanism when the British sneered at it, and despite his carefully nurtured flippancy displayed throughout his life a tenderness and compassion towards the dispossessed. But he is also political in some more elusive senses of the term—political, for example, because he is very funny, a remorseless debunker of the high-toned *gravitas* of bourgeois Victorian England. He is a radical because he takes nothing seriously, cares only for form, appearance and pleasure, and is religiously devoted to his own self-gratification. In Victorian society, such a man did not need to be the son of the Marquis of Queensberry to become an enemy of the state. I have tried to look in some of my own previous work at the complex relations between comedy and radical politics, in the context of a political left not exactly celebrated for its uproarious good humour.<sup>1</sup> The names of Mikhail Bakhtin and Bertolt Brecht signify something of this conjuncture in our time, but so also does that of Oscar Wilde. One of the many paradoxes of a transformative politics is that it is in the end all about pleasure, fulfilment, ease and serenity of being, but is forced, sometimes tragically, to forego some of these precious qualities in the essential rigour and seriousness of its practice. This contradiction in turn conceals another: that values such as pleasure, style and serenity are always politically double-edged, always weapons in the armoury of the rulers as well as potential instruments of their subversion. Wilde lives these contradictions to the full, and was conscious enough of them in his own way. If he sometimes has the offensive irresponsibility of the aesthete, he also restores to us something of the full political force of that term, as a radical rejection of mean-spirited utility and a devotion to human self-realization as an end in itself which is very close to the writings of Karl Marx. If his concern with rhetoric, humour, self-irony, the mask, theatrical self-display are at one level the fruits of an Irish lineage at odds with middle-class English moralism, they are also preoccupations which can play straight into the hands of the English aristocracy. The line between a politically scandalous obsession with surfaces, and a callow aestheticism the upper class could recognize as its own, is always with him fascinatingly difficult to draw.

---

<sup>1</sup> See in particular my *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, Verso, London 1981, and my novel, *Saints and Scholars*, Verso, London 1987

Wilde hailed from the city which Joyce spelt as Dublin, and everything about him—his nationality, sexual identity, social status, politics—is precarious, unstable, double-edged. Much previous work on Wilde has centred on his homosexuality, and this is on any account at the heart of what he was; but if I have tried to avoid writing a 'gay' play about him, this is not only because as a heterosexual I am inevitably something of an outsider in such matters, but because it seems to me vital to put that particular ambiguity or doubleness back in the context of a much wider span of ambivalences. Wilde was perverse in much more than a sexual sense, and his sexual, social and artistic perversities are deeply interrelated. His fetish, from beginning to end, was language; and *Saint Oscar* joins a long line of Anglo-Irish plays which are, for many an English ear, a good deal too verbal. Unlike the life of its subject, it could hardly be said to be crammed with exhilarating dramatic action. This may well be to do with my own limitations as a dramatist; but it is also part of a deliberate attempt to reintroduce that artistic form which has always made the genetically empiricist English most deeply uneasy, the 'theatre of ideas'. If it manages to be entertaining at the same time, as I hope it is, then this may help to dissuade the English of their complacent dogma that the intellect is one thing and a sense of humour another, a division disabling to both faculties. The Irish have on the whole found it less trouble to be funny and tragic at one and the same time; and nowhere could this duality be more graphically figured than in the life of Oscar Wilde, clown and victim, scapegoat and entertainer.

Nobody can write now of Britain and Ireland in Wilde's day without bringing to mind the tragic events which have afflicted Ireland in the past two decades. Reflections on the past are always at some level meditations on the present; and in this play I seize on the fact that one of Wilde's prosecutors was Edward Carson, later to spearhead the Unionist opposition to Home Rule, to bring the trial of Wilde to bear on the politics of the present. The Irish, so they say, have to keep remembering their own history because the English keep forgetting it; and it was Sigmund Freud who reminded us that what we do not truly remember we are doomed to repeat. Oscar Wilde's treatment at the hands of a brutal, arrogant British Establishment is being acted out once more in Ireland today, with brutality of a different kind. The significant past, Walter Benjamin remarked, is that frail image which flashes up to us at a moment of extreme danger; and Benjamin's practice of revolutionary nostalgia was to summon into the present the shades of the unjustly quelled of history, so that they might lend us something of their power. I try in this play, then, to summon the shade of Oscar Wilde back to our side when we are in urgent need of him, confident in the knowledge that whatever indignities a dispossessed people may have to endure, small nations will not rest until they are free.

NOTE: There is one quotation from the works of Oscar Wilde in this play: 'All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his' (*The Importance of Being Earnest*).

# 78 *new left review*

## DEFENDING ENLIGHTENMENT

abina Lovibond

Feminism and Postmodernism

oris Kagarlitsky

The Soviet Crisis

ed Benton

Marx and Natural Limits

im Wohlforth

Reflections on the Sixties

lain Lipietz

Disorder in the World Economy

ans Magnus  
nzensberger

An Interview on Europe

ISSN 0022-3183

1		<i>Themes</i>
5	<i>Sabina Lovibond</i>	Feminism and Postmodernism
29	<i>Boris Kagarlitsky</i>	The Importance of Being Marxist
37	<i>Alain Lipietz</i>	The Debt Problem, European Integration and the New Phase of World Crisis
51	<i>Ted Benton</i>	Marxism and Natural Limits: An Ecological Critique and Reconstruction
87	<i>Martin Chalmers/ Robert Lumley</i>	INTERVIEW Enzensberger's Europe
105	<i>Tim Wohlforth</i>	REVIEW America in the Sixties
124	<i>Michael Barratt Brown</i>	COMMENT Commercial and Industrial Capital in England: A Reply to Geoffrey Ingham

<i>Editor</i>	Robin Blackburn	
<i>Editorial Committee</i>	Tariq Ali, Perry Anderson, Patrick Camiller, Alexander Cockburn, Mike Davis, Peter Dews, Diane Elson, Norman Geras, Quentin Hoare, Oliver MacDonald, Branka Magill, Ellen Meiksins Wood	
<i>Editorial communications</i>	New Left Review, 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR	
<i>Subscriptions correspondence</i>	New Left Review, 120-126 Lavender Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HP	
<i>Business Manager</i>	Robin Gable	
<i>Advertising Manager</i>	Arthur Boyars	
<i>American Distributor</i>	B. de Boer, 113 East Center Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA	
<i>NLR Prices</i>	<i>Individual subscription:</i>	<i>Institutional subscription:</i>
<i>Inland (UK/Eire):</i>	£17	£33
<i>Europe (air) &amp; Rest of World (ASP):</i>	£21 or US\$33	£37 or US\$58
<i>USA &amp; Canada (Airspeed)</i>	£21 or US\$33 or Can\$40	£37 or US\$58
<i>Airmail overseas</i>	£29 or US\$45 or Can\$55	£45 or US\$70

MICROFICHE SETS 1-178 (1960-1989), incl. cross index £350 (inland), £365/US\$600 (overseas)

INDEX 1-178 (1960-1989) *Inland*. £28 (cloth), £13 (paper) *Overseas*. £31/US\$50 (cloth), £15/US\$24 (paper)

New Left Review (ISSN 0028-6060) is published bi-monthly by New Left Review Ltd, 6 Meard St., London W1V 3HR, UK. Annual subscription price in the USA and Canada is US\$33 for individuals, US\$58 for institutions, including airspeed delivery. Second-class postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. USA POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to New Left Review, Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Printed in Great Britain

In 1988-89 the Soviet Politburo, at long last, took the decision to hold elections in which opponents of the apparatus could contest and win elections, to allow the Supreme Soviet to play the role of a sovereign legislature and to begin to enshrine the legal defence of the rights of the individual. Such historic reforms could not have got this far unless the mass of Soviet citizens had exploited the opportunities given to them. Every meeting or demonstration, every article or speech expanding the limits of glasnost, stimulated voters to take their courage in their hands and thus lend substance to a democratization which, after decades of bureaucratic misrule, remains incomplete and insecure. Knowing that its authority derives only from popular sovereignty, the Supreme Soviet decided in October that henceforth all elections would be conducted on the basis of one person, one vote. Opposition parties have yet to be legalized, but in practice opposition slates are contesting Soviet elections, including those scheduled for February and March in the constituent Republics. It remains unclear how far Gorbachev or the new Supreme Soviet will go in meeting the national demands of the various peoples of the Soviet Union. However, outside Soviet borders the Gorbachev doctrine *has* favoured popular self-determination. The remarkable recent events in Eastern Europe show that the Soviet government is willing to throw its influence behind a transition to popular sovereignty, deeming a suspension of the Brezhnev doctrine a necessary corollary of disarmament and detente. The Polish elections, the new Hungarian Constitution, the fall of Honecker and the opening of the Berlin Wall, the ouster of Zhivkov, have all testified to a new Soviet attitude as well as to popular enthusiasm for reform, evident in resolute mass demonstrations and meetings which have done much, especially in East Germany, to hasten the pace of change.

Gorbachev's policy may be seen as a gamble and as a recognition that things simply could not go on in the old way. Economic failure, social malaise, an arrogant apparatus and corrupt nomenklatura have created conditions in which the former ruling parties have little credibility and in which the very idea of socialism has been deeply compromised. The West is bound to promote a capitalist restructuring of the East as the

price of debt cancellation, fresh credits, capital investment and the easing of trade restrictions. But there are some grounds for hoping that the new post-Communist societies will carry forward into an uncharted future social forces and values at variance with actually-existing capitalism. The action of the miners in Vorkuta and Mezhdurechensk and of the demonstrators in Leipzig and Dresden could release impulses for democratic accountability beyond the political sphere and for new forms of social initiative and economic solidarity, if not now then once the pressures of restoration become clear. The chances of a socialist outcome in the East may be slender, but if the transition to democracy is consolidated then at least more advantageous conditions for developing an anti-capitalist response will have been created.

In his last writings on the Soviet Union, notably *The Unfinished Revolution*, Isaac Deutscher warned that deep disappointment with the Stalinist outcome of the Russian Revolution would nourish restorationist sentiment. In his Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture, published in this issue, Boris Kagarlitsky explains the strength of pro-capitalist views within today's Soviet Union, amongst the intelligentsia and within the milieu of the Government's technical advisers. However, Kagarlitsky also welcomes the new scope for public opinion and salutes the emergence of working-class opposition to what he calls the 'market Stalinism' favoured by technocratic reformers. He tells us of the need to develop practical alternatives as the ruling Party goes into a new round of Republican elections in which it is once again likely to suffer major defeats.

Part of Kagarlitsky's case for 'the importance of being a Marxist' in the contemporary world is that Marxism can provide insight into the real dynamic of 'actually-existing' capitalism. In this issue we also publish Alain Lipietz's critical survey of the world capitalist economy in which he shows how the poorest countries in the world have been made to subsidize the banks of the richest. It is too early to say what impact the opening in the East will have upon the structural imbalances discussed by Lipietz. There is already pressure to cancel much of the debt which burdens Hungary and Poland. There is certainly an overwhelming case for this. But such a cancellation can and should be extended to the third world where the haemorrhage of interest payments is, if anything, even more obscene—in both cases Western institutions advanced money to states that were generally irresponsible and inefficient, and often corrupt and repressive.

Waiting to fill the vacuum created by the 'upturned utopia' are a range of

'post-modern' philosophies which cast doubt on aspirations to universal equality or liberation. Rejecting grand narratives they celebrate difference and indeterminacy. Rejecting absolute standards of truth or justice they favour an epistemological and moral relativism. In this issue of the Review Sabina Lovibond considers whether feminists should adopt such perspectives and offers an eloquent defence of the continuing validity of the ideals of equality and enlightenment. She argues that the new relativism is inimical to advancement of the cause of social justice wherever the latter encounters entrenched traditional obstacles, as the struggle for women's equality certainly does. Lovibond's conclusions are the more important in that they are of potentially general application.

In East and West alike the rise of public concern at threats to the environment indicts both heedless planners and rapacious free-market forces. It also requires of socialists a rethinking of the productivist bias that flaws most of the classical socialist economic models. Ted Benton's article in this issue seeks to contribute to such a reformulation. He argues that while Marx's work did characteristically denounce capital's pillaging of the natural environment, Marx's most developed account of the labour process failed to register natural limits or to grasp the vital and precarious contribution of natural cycles and resources.

Finally we publish an interview with Hans Magnus Enzensberger, focusing on the new forces for change in Europe and Germany, and a review by Tim Wohlforth, reassessing the historic protests of the American New Left in the sixties.

#### PRICE INCREASES

We regret that, with effect from No. 179, it will be necessary to raise the cover price of *New Left Review* to £3.50/\$6.50—the first increase since No. 165. Subscriptions received after 1 January 1990 will be charged at the new rates on the inside front cover.



VERSO

*Titles to take you into the nineties*

**THE FATE OF THE FOREST**

**Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon**

Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn

'.. a substantial work of reference, the result of more than a decade of research ..will appeal primarily as a gripping, eye-opening account of a potential eco-disaster which has already claimed many victims.'

*The Bookseller*

£16.95 hardback

**CRITIQUE OF ECONOMIC REASON**

André Gorz

'Gorz's greatest work and a crucial book for our time'

*Le Monde*

£29.95 hardback £9.95 paperback

**THE TRAITOR**

André Gorz

'An invitation to life'

*Jean-Paul Sartre*

'An unclassifiable classic'

*Le Monde*

£32.95 hardback £9.95 paperback

**GETTING RUSSIA WRONG**

**The End of Kremlinology**

Patrick Cockburn

'Patrick Cockburn was one of the few Western correspondents in Moscow who kept an open mind and open eye there. He is today a first-rate specialist on the Soviet Union.'

*Moshe Lewin*

£24.95 hardback £8.95 paperback

**THE UNSEEN**

Nanni Balestrini

'...conceived and given life and momentum within a narrative space that recalls the breathless precision of Gorky...in a single burst *The Unseen* surges ahead of the entire genre of revolutionary fiction, the social question novel or the fictional memoir..'

*La Stampa*

£12.95 hardback

**THE CONSPIRACY**

Paul Nizan

'It is a pleasure to find behind these dense heroes, the bitter and sombre personality of Nizan and his fine style, taut and casual: his long Cartesian sentences...and those rhetorical transports which suddenly come to a halt, giving way to a tense and icy verdict.'

*Jean-Paul Sartre*

£12.95 hardback



## *Feminism and Postmodernism*

The term 'postmodernism' exerts an instant fascination. For it suggests that 'modernity' is, paradoxically, already in the past; and consequently that a new form of consciousness is called for, corresponding to new social conditions. But of course it does not tell us what the distinctive character of these new conditions, or of the accompanying consciousness, is supposed to be. Expositions of postmodernism in the context of political and cultural theory often take as a negative point of reference the idea of 'Enlightenment'. I therefore propose to look at some recent examples of anti-Enlightenment polemic and to consider their meaning from a feminist point of view. I shall use as source material the writings of three well-known philosophers—Jean-François Lyotard, Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Rorty—who are among the most forceful exponents of the arguments and values which constitute postmodernism within academic philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Inevitably, then, my response to their work will also be a response to the bigger picture which I shall trace in it. But this does not mean that I believe the whole of postmodernism, even

in its philosophical variant, to be wrapped up in the pages I have chosen for study: what follows is, in the first instance, an account of a specific bit of textual exploration.

My chosen texts undoubtedly show certain common preoccupations, of which perhaps the most striking is an aversion to the idea of *universality*. The Enlightenment pictured the human race as engaged in an effort towards universal moral and intellectual self-realization, and so as the subject of a universal historical experience; it also postulated a universal human *reason* in terms of which social and political tendencies could be assessed as 'progressive' or otherwise (the goal of politics being defined as the realization of reason in practice).<sup>2</sup> Postmodernism rejects this picture: that is to say, it rejects the doctrine of the unity of reason. It refuses to conceive of humanity as a unitary subject striving towards the goal of perfect coherence (in its common stock of beliefs) or of perfect cohesion and stability (in its political practice).

### The Ideal of Consensus

All of our three philosophers illustrate, in their different ways, the postmodernist advocacy of pluralism in morals, politics and epistemology. All are struck by the thought that justification or 'legitimation' are *practices*, sustained in being by the disposition of particular, historical human communities to recognize this and not that as a good reason for doing or believing something; and all associate 'enlightenment' with a drive to establish communication between these local canons of rationality and to make them answerable to a single standard. But this is just what postmodernist thinkers complain of, for they question the merit of consensus as a regulative ideal of discourse. The policy of working for it seems to them to be objectionable on two counts: firstly as being historically outmoded, and secondly as being misguided or sinister in its own right.

The first claim frequently appears in the shape of triumphalist comments

---

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I shall draw on J-F Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester 1984, hereafter *PMC*; A MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, London 1981, hereafter *AV*; R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford 1980 (hereafter *PMN*), and 'Pragmatism and Philosophy', in his *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighton 1982, reprinted in Baynes/Bohman/McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, Cambridge, Mass. 1987.

Obviously the attempt to capture any complex argument in a brief survey is liable to lead to some oversimplification, and in particular it should be noticed that Rorty in *PMN* refers to the Enlightenment separation of science from theology and politics as 'our most precious cultural heritage' (p. 333). The main motive of his book, however, is to voice a 'hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology [i.e., of the commitment to rendering all discourse commensurable] will not be filled' (p. 315), and this identifies him for our purposes as an anti-Enlightenment theorist. The themes of *After Virtue* are developed further in MacIntyre's more recent book, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, London 1988.

<sup>2</sup> For an expression of this kind of intellectual monism, cf. Kant, Preface to *The Metaphysical Principles of Rights* (in *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, trs. James Ellington, 1964, p. 5): '... inasmuch as there can be only one human reason, so likewise there cannot be many philosophies; that is, only one true system of philosophy based on principles is possible, however variously and often contradictorily men may have philosophized over one and the same proposition.'

on the defeat of revolutionary socialism in the West. MacIntyre, for example, singles out Marxism for special mention as an 'exhausted' political tradition.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Lyotard argues that 'most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative' (that is, for the idea of humanity as tending towards a condition of universal emancipation, the prospect of which endows the historical process with meaning);<sup>4</sup> and he connects the declining influence of such 'grand narratives' with 'the redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism [after 1960], ... a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternative and valorized the individual enjoyment of goods and services'.<sup>5</sup>

The second claim—namely, that the pursuit of ideal consensus is misguided—finds expression in arguments for a more accepting attitude towards the contingency and particularity of our 'language-games'. It is not that postmodernism subscribes to the view that whatever is, is sacrosanct: quite the reverse, in fact, in the case of Rorty and Lyotard, who prize innovation for its own sake. It does, however, deny that the replacement of one 'game' by another can be evaluated according to any absolute standard (e.g. as being 'progressive' or the reverse, in the sense fixed by a teleological view of history). The thought is that since history has no direction (or: since it is no longer possible to think of it as having a direction), any new configuration of language-games which we may succeed in substituting for the present one will be just as 'contingent' as its predecessor—it will be neither more nor less remote from 'realizing (universal) reason in practice'.

It is not surprising then to discover in this literature a leaning towards non-teleological descriptions of discursive activity. Rorty wishes to transfer to *conversation* the prestige currently enjoyed by 'enquiry';<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre's reflections on morality lead him to the conclusion that *mythology*, the range of narrative archetypes through which a culture instructs its members in their own identity, is 'at the heart of things'.<sup>7</sup> Neither 'conversation' nor 'mythology' is naturally understood as aiming at a single, stable representation of reality, one which would deserve the name of 'truth' in something more than a contextual or provisional sense. And it is this negative feature which fits the terms in question for their role in expounding a 'postmodernism of the intellect'.

But the divorce of intellectual activity from the pursuit of ideal consensus is too important a theme to be entrusted to one or two happily chosen words. Rorty, as we shall see later, explicitly states that a form of life which no longer aspires towards a more-than-provisional truth will be *better*, on broad cultural grounds, than one which continues to do so; while Lyotard goes further and equates that aspiration with 'terror', believing as he does that it leads inevitably to the suppression

---

<sup>3</sup> AV, p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> PMC, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> PMC, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> PMN, p. 318.

<sup>7</sup> AV, p. 201.

of diversity or 'difference'.<sup>8</sup> He even calls for a 'war on totality'—a reassertion of the familiar liberal teaching that, while it may be a regrettable necessity to place constraints on liberty in the name of social order, one must not actively seek to bind together the multiplicity of thought and practice into a single 'moral organism' or 'significant whole'.<sup>9</sup>

The robust partisanship of these texts entitles us to think of 'post-modernism' as a *movement* defining itself by reference to, and in reaction against, modernity. There is, admittedly, no single way in which our three sources illustrate this reaction.<sup>10</sup> They are united, though, in their opposition to the Enlightenment demand that what exists should justify itself before a timeless 'tribunal of reason'. In their view, justification (or legitimation) is always local and context-relative; and the supersession of one local criterion of legitimacy by another is to be seen not as an approximation towards some ultimate criterion that would transcend all local bias, but at most as the outcome of self-questioning on the part of a particular tradition.

This view of legitimation is sometimes presented as the (more attractive) rival of a view called 'Platonism'. The 'Platonism' in question is defined by reference to just one doctrine taken from the historical Plato: the idea that *truth* goes beyond, or 'transcends', our current *criteria of truth*. A recurrent feature of postmodernist theory is the claim that Platonism in this sense is obsolete—that is, that it is no longer possible to believe in a transcendent truth against which the whole intellectual achievement of the human race to date could be measured and found wanting. And postmodernist scepticism about this conception of truth extends also to the distinctive method of enquiry which Plato envisaged as our means of access to genuine knowledge. It extends, in other words, to the idea of human thought as a *dialectical* process: one which would generate a positive result (a body of beliefs which was perfectly stable, because incapable of further correction) by way of the relentless application of a negative method (the method of hunting down and eliminating internal contradiction).

According to the dialectical view of knowledge, this positive result would mark the *end* of enquiry, the point at which thought would come to rest because there would be no possibility of further progress. But this prospect is no longer viewed with universal enthusiasm; it has become controversial. Thus we are invited to see it as a merit of

<sup>8</sup> PMC, p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> For 'moral organism', cf. F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, London 1927, p. 177; and for 'significant whole', cf. H.H. Joachim, *The Nature of Truth*, London 1906, pp. 68ff.

<sup>10</sup> Lyotard, for example, sees in the postmodern experience the 'truth' of the modern one (the former, he says, is *part* of the latter and inherits from it the maxim that 'all that has been received . . . must be suspected' (PMC, p. 79); MacIntyre's position by contrast seems more akin to that of postmodernists in the field of art and design, where the distinguishing mark of the school has been found in a certain relation to the past—a reappropriation of traditional forms of expression, combined however with a historical knowlengness acquired in the passage through modernity (cf. Charles Jencks, *What is Postmodernism?*, London 1986, p. 18).

postmodernist 'conversation' that (in contrast to dialectic) it aims, not at its own closure, but at its own continuation: it offers us the prospect of a limitless future enlivened at one point by episodes of agreement, at another by 'exciting and fruitful disagreement'.<sup>11</sup>

To the postmodern reappraisal of our dealings with the objective world, or with 'reality', there corresponds a striking development on the side of the moral and cognitive *subject*. Here too there is some historical justification for attaching the label 'Platonist' to the view against which postmodernism is in revolt. For in Plato's *Republic* the dialectical progress of theory towards perfect coherence is supposed to go hand in hand with an analogous tendency towards coherence in the mind of the enquirer. As the practice of dialectic strengthens my intellectual grasp of truth and goodness, so I am to picture myself advancing towards perfect mental integration: that is, towards a condition in which no sudden access of emotion, no previously unconsidered aspect of things, is able to disturb the ordering of my beliefs and values.

### Positive Liberty

Ever since its invention, this ideal of integrated or 'centred' subjectivity has been linked with that of *personal freedom*. However, the freedom which it promises is not the merely negative state of exemption from external constraints—the 'liberty of spontaneity' which Hume, for example, maintained was the only sort we could intelligibly wish for. It is, rather, a 'positive liberty' arising from the proper internal organization of the mind. Positive liberty (also known as 'autonomy') results from the achievement of a state of mind in which the decisions or commands issued by the *true* subject (the subject *qua* exemplar of ideal coherence and stability) cannot be overturned by recalcitrant impulses or 'passions'.<sup>12</sup> To be free in this sense is to be emancipated from the influence of beliefs and desires which our critical judgement condemns as irrational.

The logical conclusion of this line of argument is that freedom can be attributed without qualification only to those in whom the potential for reason has been fully realized—that is, only to a perfectly rational being. Others (and that means all of us, though we presumably fall short of the ideal in varying degrees) may enjoy a subjective feeling of freedom in our actions; but if we continue to develop intellectually we are destined, some day, to perceive (with hindsight) the relative unfreedom of our current patterns of behaviour.

We can set down as a further component of the Enlightenment outlook the hope of achieving positive liberty by shaking off all accidental (i.e., non-rational) constraints on the way we think and act. The classical 'centred subject' was free because he was no longer at the mercy of unpredictable bouts of passion or appetite; analogously,

---

<sup>11</sup> PHMN, p. 318

<sup>12</sup> For this characterization of 'positive' and 'negative' liberty, cf. Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in his *Four Essays on Liberty*, London 1969.

the modern one is free in virtue of his or her liberation from the influence of social forces which s/he does not understand, and so cannot resist. Marxism, for example, encourages us to work towards freedom in this sense by gaining insight into the capitalist economic order and the ideology that goes with it; feminism, at least some of the time, has invited us (women) to search our behaviour and our inner lives for signs of adjustment to a woman-hating culture, so that we can gradually overcome the *self-hatred* induced by that adjustment. (This was the idea behind 'consciousness-raising'.)

The long march towards autonomy by way of the conquest of our own stupidity (or more accurately, by making ourselves less susceptible to external determination) can be summed up in the word 'transcendence'. In the moral and political context, as in the epistemological one, to 'transcend' is to go beyond. The pursuit of a fully integrated subjectivity takes the form of an attempt to rise above our present mental limitations.

This related idea of transcendence has also attracted hostile attention in recent years. The hostility comes partly from postmodernist critics of Enlightenment, who have rightly observed its connection with the idea of 'universal reason'. (If I'm trying to rise above the limitations of a local or partial understanding of things, then presumably what I'm aiming at is a fully-rounded, impartial or universal understanding.) Thus MacIntyre speaks in positively patronizing terms of that last word in Enlightenment-style moral autonomy, the Nietzschean *Ueberschensch* or 'man who transcends':<sup>13</sup> isolated, self-absorbed, 'wanting in respect of both relationships and activities', this individual clearly needs help from a psychiatric social worker.

Interestingly for our purposes, though, criticism of transcendence as a moral ideal has also begun to be heard in feminist quarters. It has been argued that, from the outset, Western philosophy has devised one scheme of imagery after another to convey, essentially, a single vision—that of *man*, the normal or complete representative of the species, standing out against a background of mere 'nature'; and that this background has consistently been symbolized by *woman* or femininity. Plato's guardians emerge from the womb-like Cave of 'common sense' into the daylight of knowledge; Hegel's citizens attain maturity by leaving the obscure, private world of the family, of which Woman is the presiding genius. In short, the passage from nature to freedom, or from 'heteronomy' to autonomy, has been represented in terms of an escape by the male from the sheltered, feminine surroundings in which he begins his life.<sup>14</sup> We have thus arrived at a point of apparent convergence between feminism and postmodernism—a common coolness towards one of the key elements in the Enlightenment ideal. It is time now to change tack and to consider, in the light

<sup>13</sup> AV, p. 239.

<sup>14</sup> For this reading of *Republic* vii, cf. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Ithaca 1985, pp. 243 ff, and for a fuller reconstruction of the idea of masculinity as transcendence, cf. Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, London 1984.

of feminist concerns, how far these two tendencies might be able to enter into a friendly relationship.

### Tradition and Modernity

One of the first thoughts likely to occur in the course of any historical reflection on feminism is that it is a typically *modern* movement. The emergence of sexual equality as a practical political goal can be seen as one element in the complex course of events by which tradition has given way, over a matter of centuries, to a way of life that is deeply *untraditional*—in fact, to 'modernity' in a semi-technical sense of the word (the sense in which it denotes a historical period).

'Modern' conditions are those created by technological progress and by the ever-expanding commerce of nations. They are the kind of conditions which uproot people from ancient communities and force them to negotiate their own survival in a capitalist 'free market'. A key text in the development of this idea of modernity is Marx's and Engels's famous description of the chaos and anarchy of life under capitalism—a description offset, however, by their positive vision of the old economic order as pregnant with a new one.<sup>5</sup> According to this view, the 'collapse of all fixed, fast-frozen relations' creates the historic opportunity for humanity, represented in the first instance by the industrial working class, to seize control over its own collective existence through revolution. In classical Marxist terms, the urban proletariat has the necessary qualifications for this role because it is made up of *modern* human beings—men (and also, though problematically, women<sup>6</sup>) who have been forcibly emancipated from traditional ways of life, and so from the limited outlook of their peasant ancestors. It is thanks to the formation of such a class that the horror of modernity also contains a promise: *sooner or later, arbitrary authority will cease to exist*. Anyone who is stirred by this promise is still, to that extent, within the Enlightenment habit of thought. Their response indicates sympathy with the Enlightenment refusal to attach any moral or intellectual force to tradition as such.

Now, it is difficult to see how one could count oneself a feminist and

---

<sup>5</sup> Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' in Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848*. Political Writings, Vol. I, ed. David Fernbach, NLU/Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 70: 'Constant revolutionizing of the means of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned . . .'. Marshall Berman pursues this analysis in depth in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Verso, London 1982, ch. 11.

<sup>6</sup> For a review of the problems here, cf. Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Brighton 1983, ch. 4. More polemical discussions of the shortcomings of orthodox Marxist approaches to the 'woman question' can be found in Christine Delphy, 'The Main Enemy' in her *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, trs. and ed. Diana Leonard, London 1984, and in Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', in Lydia Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate on Class and Patriarchy*, London 1981.

remain indifferent to the modernist promise of social reconstruction. From a female point of view, 'tradition' has (to put it mildly) an unenviable historical record. Yet it is in the area of sexual relations that 'traditional values' (marriage, home ownership, wholesome family life, etc.) are proving hardest to shift. Perhaps no other feature of the pre-modern scene has persisted so stubbornly as male dominance—the class system constructed on the basis of biological sexual difference; certainly the thought of a time when concepts such as 'wife' and 'husband', with all the moral atmosphere they evoke, will be as obsolete as 'villein' or 'lord of the manor' is apt to set off a landslide in the mind. Still, if we assess without prejudice the implications for gender (I mean, for masculinity and femininity as cultural constructs) of the 'modern' repudiation of unearned privilege, we may well conclude that this development is an integral part of the package; and if so, it will follow that feminists have at least as much reason as the rest of the world for regarding the 'project of modernity', at the present time, as incomplete.<sup>77</sup>

What, then, are we to make of suggestions that the project has run out of steam and that the moment has passed for remaking society on rational, egalitarian lines? It would be only natural for anyone placed at the sharp end of one or more of the existing power structures (gender, race, capitalist class . . .) to feel a pang of disappointment at this news. But wouldn't it also be in order to feel *suspicion*? How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?

Let us focus again on the idea of 'universal reason', and on the recent questioning of this idea. Among feminists, we noticed, the questions have been prompted by a sense of the historical connection between rationalist ideals and the belief in a hierarchical opposition of 'mind' and 'nature'—the latter opposition in turn being associated with a contempt for 'immanence', finitude, and the muddle of embodied existence generally (the 'lead weights of becoming', as Plato put it<sup>78</sup>). On this analysis, the Enlightenment rhetoric of 'emancipation', 'autonomy' and the like is complicit in a fantasy of escape from the embodied condition;<sup>79</sup> as such, it feeds into one of the most notorious aberrations of European culture, and any philosophy which challenges it is likely to have considerable critical force.

Feminist theory is in fact deeply indebted to the efforts of philosophy over the last century and more to 'naturalize' epistemology, or in other words to represent the activity we call 'enquiry' as part of the natural history of human beings. For naturalist or materialist analyses of the institutions of knowledge-production—schools, universities, the wider 'republic of letters'—have made it possible to expose the unequal part played by different social groups in determining standards

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project', in Hal Foster, ed., *Post-modern Culture*, London 1983.

<sup>78</sup> *Republic* vii, 519ab.

<sup>79</sup> The exposure of this fantasy has been one of the concerns of feminist writing on pornography. Cf. Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature*, London 1981.



of judgement.<sup>20</sup> In this way they have revealed the ideological character of value-systems which have previously passed as objective or universally valid (consider, for example, the growth of scepticism about academic canons of 'greatness' in literature). Feminism can benefit as much as any other radical movement from the realization that our ideas of personal, technical or artistic merit, or of intelligibility and cogency in argument, do not 'drop from the sky' but are mediated by an almost interminable process of social teaching and training.

These achievements seem to demonstrate the critical potential of a local or plural conception of 'reason', and so to underwrite its claim to the confidence of feminists. But before we jump to any conclusions, we had better look more closely at the ways in which postmodernist theory puts that conception to work. In the remainder of this paper I shall introduce three themes which seem to me to qualify as distinctively postmodern; and in each case I shall suggest grounds for doubting whether postmodernism can be adopted by feminism as a theoretically ally. For ease of reference I shall attach labels to my three postmodernist themes: we can call them respectively 'dynamic pluralism', 'quiet pluralism' and 'pluralism of inclination'.

As we begin our survey, we should bear in mind that there is nothing in the communitarian insight *per se* (I mean, in the idea that standards of judgement are historically and culturally conditioned) which would explain postmodernist hostility to the vision of ideal consensus. One might very well be impressed by the perspectival character of knowledge-claims, and yet still see enquiry as necessarily seeking to bring all 'perspectives' on reality into communication—to construct a body of thought, or a system of values, accessible indifferently from any starting-point. This after all is the 'cheerful hope' which has animated coherentist theories of knowledge from Plato to C.S. Peirce and beyond,<sup>21</sup> and it is by no means obvious that when such theories take a naturalist turn they are bound to renounce the Kantian postulate of a 'special interest of reason' in picturing reality as a single, unified

---

<sup>20</sup> 'Naturalist or materialist': there exists in the theory of knowledge a spectrum of positions prompted by the failure of the Cartesian quest for certainty. At one end of the spectrum—the 'positivist' end, so to speak—we have (e.g.) W.V. Quine's vision of '[e]pistemology, or something like it, simply fall[ing] into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science' and his programmatic statement that 'We are after an understanding of science as an institution or process in the world' (cf. 'Epistemology Naturalized', in his *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York 1969, pp. 82, 84), at the other, 'critical', and we have a variety of views which take the latter programme in a political sense and search out the hidden power-relations underlying not only (natural) science, but everything else to which the honorific title of 'knowledge' is assigned. 'Epistemic naturalism' can function as an umbrella term covering this whole spectrum of positions, 'epistemic materialism' is probably best reserved for a subset of them, namely those which seek to apply the Marxist method of historical materialism to the processes in question. (But Marxism does not exhaust the subversive options, which indeed can no longer be summed up without residue under the heading of 'critique'—witness the work of Nietzsche and Foucault.)

<sup>21</sup> For Peirce's position, cf. 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear' in his *Collected Papers*, Vol. V, Cambridge, Mass. 1934, p. 268: '... all the followers of science are animated by a cheerful hope that the process of investigation, if only pushed far enough, will give one certain solution to each question to which they apply it... This great hope is embodied in the conception of truth and reality.'

system.<sup>22</sup> In fact, there is no reason in principle why a naturalist epistemology should not interpret in its own terms—namely, as referring to the regulative idea of a single, unified *human culture*—Kant's metaphor of the 'imaginary point', located beyond the limits of possible experience, upon which all lines of rational activity appear to converge.<sup>23</sup>

To call this point 'imaginary' is simply to record the irrelevance, from an epistemological point of view, of worries about when (if ever) we can actually expect to reach the goal of enquiry. Continuing for a moment in a Kantian vein, we can say that although theory (like morality) would no doubt be impossible if the relevant subjective 'maxims' had *no* general appeal to the mind, still theoretical effort (like moral effort) is essentially non-contractual: that is, you are not genuinely engaged in either if you make your contribution conditional on an assurance that all other contributions required to achieve the goal of the exercise will actually be forthcoming. We are therefore concerned here with the epistemic equivalent of an article of faith, a commitment to persist in the search for common ground with others: in fact, something which could not be relinquished on pain of sinking into 'hatred of reason and of humanity'.<sup>24</sup>

#### 'Dynamic Pluralism'

As soon as the rationalist conception of enquiry is represented as a matter of *policy*, however (an idea already implicit in Kant's talk of the 'interests' of reason), it becomes fair game for psychological interpretation: that is, it can be seen as expressive of a certain temperament or cast of mind. And it is on this psychological territory that the tendency I have called 'dynamic pluralism' issues its challenge. Lyotard is an appropriate case-study here, since his historical thesis about the eclipse of 'grand narratives' develops itself into a series of more or less explicit suggestions on the subject of postmodern mental health.

As we saw earlier, Lyotard believes that the Enlightenment ideal of a 'revisable consensus governing the entire corpus of language-games played by a community' has lost its grip on the collective imagination.<sup>25</sup> Nowadays, he thinks, the main motive to intellectual activity is the hope of benefiting from the 'performance capabilities' of a 'complex conceptual and material machinery', whose users, however, 'have at their disposal no metalanguage or metanarrative in which to formulate the final goal and correct use of that machinery'.<sup>26</sup> Under these conditions the rationalist demand for *legitimation* of a putative bit of 'knowledge' has been superseded by a limitless quest for discursive novelty or 'paralogy';<sup>27</sup> consequently, any lingering conviction

<sup>22</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., A644/B672.

<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 89d

<sup>25</sup> PMC, p. 65

<sup>26</sup> PMC, p. 52

<sup>27</sup> PMC, pp. 65–6. This theme is echoed by Rorty's account of the motive forces of post-epistemological discourse, which includes a reference to 'individual men of genius who think of something new' (PMN, p. 264).

that thought has some overarching *purpose*, some destination where it could rest, must be viewed as a sign of imperfect adaptation to postmodernity. The authentically postmodern consciousness is experimental, combative, 'severe': it 'denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable.'<sup>28</sup>

Postmodernism, then, according to Lyotard, is an extension of modernism in that each seeks to articulate the experience of a disorderly, directionless world—an experience compounded of pleasure and pain, conducted in the glare of high-tech extravagance which, like the Kantian sublime, stuns the imagination.<sup>29</sup> But the two positions differ as to what sort of consciousness would be equal to, or worthy of, such conditions. Modernism remains within the 'Enlightenment project' to the extent that it pictures the cognitive mastery of modernity as a step on the road to *ending* it (by a collective reimposition of form on chaos, as in the Marxist theory of revolution);<sup>30</sup> postmodernism on the other hand would have us plunge, romantically, into the maelstrom without making it our goal to emerge on *terra firma*.

How should feminist readers respond to the charge of 'nostalgia' as directed against rationalist ideas? In considering this question, we may find it helpful to draw on historical evidence: that is, to look into the formation of the sensibility expressed in the relevant postmodernist texts. Taking a hint from some respectful comments of Lyotard's,<sup>31</sup> we can enter more fully into the anti-Enlightenment spirit by way of the writings of Nietzsche—perhaps the sternest of all critics of 'idealism' in general, in the sense of a disposition to compare the real world with an ideal one and to find it wanting. It is this disposition which, in Nietzschean terms, constitutes 'nihilism'—the tendency which he portrays on a more intuitive level as a sickness transmitted to European civilization through the combined impact of Platonism and Christianity. 'Interesting' as humanity may have become by virtue of this sickness,<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche's own thought achieves world-historic significance (or so he claims) by bringing us to the threshold of recovery, and of a passage into the 'second innocence' of godlessness. But the 'godless' condition is not so easily attained as many self-styled free-thinkers imagine. 'They are far from being *free* spirits', Nietzsche

<sup>28</sup> PMC, p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> PMC, p. 77; cf. Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, §23.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', in *New Left Review* 144, p. 113—a passage which, incidentally, contains a useful corrective to the tendency to confuse eliminating contradiction with suppressing difference. (For a more extended reply to the charge that discourse aiming at (universal) truth necessarily seeks to 'unify coercively a multiplicity of standpoints', cf. Peter Dews, *Logos of Disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, Verso, London 1987, pp. 220 ff.; the words quoted appear on p. 222.)

<sup>31</sup> PMC, p. 39. For reasons of space I have omitted any discussion of Lyotard's conspicuous *divergence* from Nietzsche in claiming that 'justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect' (p. 66). I do not think this need prevent us from getting to grips with his overall argument, since the idea that justice ought to be salvaged receives very perfunctory attention in PMC in comparison with the idea that universality ought to be jettisoned.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (hereafter GM), Essay II, §16.

comments on the positivists of his own day, '*for they still have faith in truth*'; whereas a more resolute scepticism would rise to the discovery that 'man's truths [are ultimately] only his irrefutable errors'.<sup>33</sup>

Nietzsche's critique of truth may seem at first sight to be addressed mainly to adherents of a foundational epistemology on empiricist lines (i.e., to those who believe that knowledge rests on a foundation of indubitable, because purely experiential, propositions). Taking a broader view, however, we find that he is at least equally devastating about an alternative way of 'having faith in truth', namely that embodied in the practice of dialectics and (by implication) in modern coherentist theories of knowledge. In fact, Nietzsche discerns in the method of argument invented by Socrates and Plato the psychological key to all subsequent manifestations of rationalism. For the Socratic habit of thought is one which assumes the possibility, and desirability, of eliminating conflict through the gradual convergence of all parties on a single, stable point of view. As such, it has always had a plebeian taint—for the elimination of conflict, Nietzsche observes, is a goal apt to appeal above all to those who can expect to be worsted in conflict: in other words, to the weak. 'Wherever authority is still part of accepted usage and one does not "give reasons" but commands, the dialectician is a kind of buffoon . . . One chooses dialectics only when one has no other expedient . . . Dialectics can be only a last-ditch weapon in the hands of those who have no other weapon left . . . That is why the Jews were dialecticians.'<sup>34</sup>

Rationalism, in Nietzsche's view, remains true to its origin in the will-to-power of the dispossessed: its lineage is betrayed by its wish to transpose conflict from the arena of blows (or of showmanship) into that of rule-governed argument, where the physical or social underdog has a hope of winning. This wish marks it out as a natural ally of the democratic movements of the modern world. For the aim of these movements is to subvert the social conditions which Nietzsche would regard as necessary to the expression of a 'natural order of rank'; that is, they aim to eliminate various sorts of class relationship, and hence various forms of exploitation or dispossession. (In another idiom: they seek to characterize, ever more rigorously, a social order in which the willing participation of all rational persons can be expected—a 'kingdom of ends' with each traditional impediment to membership, whether in terms of class, religion, race or sex, successively provoking resistance and being swept away.) In short, then, truth as a regulative ideal is the creation of a socially inferior type of mind. It is the *ressentiment* of the rabble—their sinister genius for making the 'naturally good' feel bad about themselves—which gives rise to this ideal. For as soon as humanity allows itself to be caught up in the 'pursuit of truth', it slips into the way of defining intellectual virtue in terms of a contrasting vice invented by the rabble as an instrument of psychological warfare against their 'betters': the vice of contradicting oneself, or of being committed (unwittingly, no doubt, but this only adds to the

---

<sup>33</sup> GM, Essay III, §25, trs Walter Kaufmann, 1969, *The Gay Science* (hereafter GS), §265, trs Kaufmann, 1974.

<sup>34</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, 'The Problem of Socrates', §6, trs R.J. Hollingdale, 1968.

intimidatory power of the dialectical method) to the assertion of propositions related as 'P' and 'not-P'. (Notice the daring of Nietzsche's suggestion that self-contradiction is not a fault in any absolute or eternal sense: he insists that it was *human beings*, and a particular category of human beings at that, who hit upon coherence as a criterion of value in assessing thought-processes.)

## Nietzsche and the Enlightenment

Nietzsche, too, dreams of overcoming 'modernity' in all its anarchic ugliness. But in his view this will be achieved, not through a realization of Enlightenment political ambitions, but through a recovery from the 'sickness' of Enlightenment ideals—truth, reason, morality (the modern successors to 'God'). Nietzsche concurs in drawing together under the heading of 'modernity' all the egalitarian tendencies of the last few centuries in Europe—liberalism, socialism and feminism alike. He sees feminism, in other words, as one component of the rationalist political programme. And in fact this is a view which many feminists can probably share.<sup>35</sup> It is a view which can be summed up by saying that feminism, at least in its utopian moods (as opposed to its angry and pugnacious ones, which of course are equally essential to it), aspires to *end the war between men and women* and to replace it with communicative transparency, or truthfulness.

Now, it's well known that any expression of moral revulsion against war is, for Nietzsche, a 'symptom of declining life';<sup>36</sup> but there is, perhaps, no branch of life in which rationalism and pacifism are more offensive to him than in that of sexuality.<sup>37</sup> The force of his conviction on this point suggests to Nietzsche an intimate, even a quasi-conceptual, connection between the idea of an emancipation from reason, on one hand, and that of an end to feminism on the other. This connection is mediated by his concept of virility, the quality supposedly expressed in a love of 'danger, war and adventures'—a refusal 'to compromise, to be captured, reconciled and castrated'.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> 'Many', not all: obviously this conception rides roughshod over the claims of a 'feminism of difference'. I believe that reflection on sexual difference can be both intellectually and politically enabling, but incline ultimately towards the view that 'Glorification of the feminine character implies the humiliation of all who bear it' (Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trs. E.F.N. Jephcott, Verso, London, 1974, p. 96). However, I cannot argue the point here.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. GM, loc. cit. (Kaufmann, p. 154) 'A predominance of mandarins always means something is wrong; so do the advent of democracy, international courts in place of war, equal rights for women, the religion of pity, and whatever other symptoms of declining life there are.' This feature of his thought should be kept clearly in view over against reminders—however valid—that Nietzsche is not a crude prophet of aggression, nor his 'will to power' equivalent to bloodlust (cf. Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism: Poststructuralism and Law*, Oxford 1984, pp. 200 ff.) No doubt it was vulgar of the Italian Futurists to babble about 'War, the sole hygiene . . .', but the fact remains that for Nietzsche it is in the end a sign of spiritual poverty to regard war, injury and exploitation as detracting from the perfection of the world.

<sup>37</sup> *Ecce Homo*, 'Why I write such good books', §5, trs. Kaufmann: 'Has my definition of love been heard? It is the only one worthy of a philosopher. Love—in its means, war; at bottom, the deadly hatred of the sexes.'

<sup>38</sup> GM, §377, trs. Kaufmann.

We must understand this statement not only in its obvious sense but also in an epistemological one. In a world without truth—a world in which the contrast between 'reality' and 'appearance' has been abolished—the interpretation of experience is itself a field for invention, for *hazarding* one's own expressive gestures or acts without seeking for them the safety of confirmation (i.e., of incorporation into a shared and stable body of theory). The cognitive activity of a future, and better, humanity will involve not the suppression of individuality and sensuality (the 'false private self' of the coherentist régime), but rather their subordination to a commanding will.

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on our guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject'; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as 'pure reason', 'absolute spirituality', 'knowledge in itself': these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective knowing; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity', be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this—what would that mean but to *castrate* the intellect?<sup>39</sup>

Consistently with the idea that to attempt an impersonal or 'selfless' view of reality would be to 'castrate' the intellect, Nietzsche elsewhere describes his work in general as 'hostile . . . to the whole of European *feminism* (or idealism, if [we] prefer that word)',<sup>40</sup> and speaks of his 'faith that Europe will become more virile'.<sup>41</sup> 'Feminism', then, occurs in Nietzsche's writing not only as the name of a contemporary political movement (though of course he has a good deal to say about women's emancipation on the level of indignant commonplace),<sup>42</sup> but also as a shorthand term for the mental impotence implicit (or so he believes) in the bondage of thought to regulative ideals such as truth, reality and goodness. Thought is *emasculated*, Nietzsche argues, in so far as it consents to be 'drawn aloft' (à la Goethe) by the ever-receding goal of a perfectly stable condition in which it could find peace.

My motive in introducing Nietzsche into the discussion has not been purely negative. I have no wish to ridicule his account of the psychological meaning of epistemological and political rationalism—his interpretation of the rationalist enterprise in terms of a desire for the elimination of conflict and of arbitrary relations of command. I wish, simply, to suggest that we take seriously Nietzsche's own

<sup>39</sup> GM, Essay III, §12, trs. Kaufmann

<sup>40</sup> *Daybreak*, Preface, §4, trs. Hollingdale, 1982.

<sup>41</sup> GS, §362, and cf. GM, Essay III, §27, where the statement that 'morality will gradually perish now' refers to the same historical prospect.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§231–9.

understanding of his work as a contribution to the overcoming of 'feminism'; and that we maintain, as feminists, a suitably critical attitude to the reappearance in contemporary philosophy of one of Nietzsche's central themes—that of the supersession of 'modernity' by a *harder*, less wimpish form of subjectivity.<sup>43</sup>

I must stress that to point out the phallic or 'masculine protest' character of Nietzsche's philosophy, and of postmodernist theory in its more overtly Nietzschean moods, is not meant to be a prelude to arguing that the values despised by this tradition deserve to be restored to a position of honour *because* they are 'feminine' and, as such, good. I do not mean to suggest that we should turn to Nietzsche for an understanding of what is 'feminine', any more than to other purveyors of the dominant ideology of gender. Instead, my suggestion is that in reading postmodernist theory we should be on the watch for signs of indulgence in a certain collective *fantasy* of masculine agency or identity. Turning upon the Nietzscheans their own preferred genealogical method, we might ask: *who* thinks it is so humiliating to be caught out in an attitude of 'nostalgia for lost unity', or of longing for a world of human subjects sufficiently 'centred' to speak to and understand one another?<sup>44</sup>

### The Attack on Universality

I have been arguing for a sceptical response to the kind of postmodernist position which I labelled 'dynamic pluralism'. This position, I have suggested, is informed by an irrationalism whose historical origin lies in reactionary distaste for modernist social movements, and specifically for the movement towards sexual equality. I turn now to the second of my three postmodernist themes, namely

<sup>43</sup> In the neo-Nietzschean discourse of the present day, the theme of 'hostility to feminism' is, not surprisingly, repressed. But this repressed material has a way of returning in contexts where the Enlightenment project of legitimation is up for criticism. An example is supplied by Vincent Descombes, expounding the views of Lyotard in *Modern French Philosophy*, Cambridge 1980, p. 182: '... in more general terms, no sooner do we become aware that truth is only the expression of a will to truth than we must face the fact that this "truth" betrays a timid rejection of the world in as much as it is not a "true world" (stable, ordered and just)'. Notice the taunt: a *timid* rejection! This is the same rhetoric by means of which Nietzsche seeks to put the Enlightenment on the defensive—a rhetoric which associates the truth-orientated habit of thought with 'castration' (in the psychoanalytic sense).

<sup>44</sup> Certainly, the idea of the outsider or 'nomad' (the individual who gets by, morally speaking, without any home base) has its own pathos, and even—in a rationalist context—its own justification (we have to deny ourselves *false* comforts in order not to be diverted from the quest for *true* ones, i.e. for a better world). But as the badge of a self-constituting elite—a Nietzschean 'aristocracy of the spirit'—it is merely the flip side of the bourgeois order. The nomad is the 'other' of the reliable paterfamilias; he is the 'untamed' male who has escaped from the trap of domesticity (cf. Gilles Deleuze's 'terrible mothers, terrible sisters and wives': *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, London 1983, p. 187). This cultural cliché is beginning to attract some well-deserved feminist criticism. cf. Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder*, Cambridge 1987, esp. pp. 52–69; 155–162. Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men. American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, London 1983, also contains relevant material.

'quiet pluralism'. Our concern here will be with the postmodern 'rediscovery' of the local and customary—a societal counterpart, perhaps, of the revival of vernacular architecture.

It may appear at first glance that there is a world of difference between Nietzsche's own vision of a radical renunciation of the 'Socratic' or truth-orientated way of life, and on the other hand the postmodernist proposal that we scrap the Enlightenment project of *absolute* legitimation (the attempt, for example, to create a society that could not be faulted by any rational being). And with this difference in view, it may be objected that the discovery of Nietzschean echoes in the rhetoric of postmodernist theory is of no more than marginal philosophical interest. For to read that theory as an updated Nietzscheanism (the objection will run) is to miss its central point. Postmodernism does not condemn the pursuit of truth or virtue within local, self-contained discursive communities—the quest for 'truth' as distinct from 'Truth', as Rorty might put it, or of 'virtue' as distinct from 'Virtue' (the latter meaning the excellence of a human being simply *qua* human and without reference to any particular social role). It reserves its criticism for the idea that we should evaluate the activity of each of these communities by a universal standard—that we should try to make them all 'commensurable'.

We must recognize that postmodernist theory freely concedes the ability of local 'language-games'—natural science, moral traditions, etc.—to reflect on themselves and to pass judgements of value on particular 'moves' made or contemplated by participants. (That is to say, they can ask—according to the concession—questions such as 'Is this a valid contribution to scientific theory?' or 'Is this sort of conduct consistent with the received moral ideals of our community?') Thus for Lyotard 'the striking feature of postmodern scientific knowledge is that the discourse on the rules that validate it is (explicitly) immanent to it',<sup>45</sup> while MacIntyre, anxious to stress that a revival of virtue-centred ethical theory need not be opposed to debate and innovation, claims that 'a healthy [moral] tradition is sustained by its own internal arguments and conflicts'.<sup>46</sup>

This concession is chiefly interesting, however, for the question it raises: how are we to draw any principled distinction between the rejection of Enlightenment rationalism and the rejection of legitimation as such? The concession is, after all, a very significant one; for having been told that intellectual traditions incorporate a capacity for critical reflection, we might well suppose that the forces of Enlightenment had captured the high ground in the current argument. If discursive communities are capable of self-criticism in principle, we might ask, then who is to dictate how far they shall take it? Won't there always be room for more, so long as *any* intelligible criticism can be addressed to the moral or cognitive order under which we live? And what is this limitless commitment to the dialectical revision of theory and practice, if not precisely the

---

<sup>45</sup> PMC, p. 54.

<sup>46</sup> AV, p. 242



Enlightenment commitment to haul up everything in life before the tribunal of reason?<sup>47</sup>

The likely reply to this challenge is that although postmodernism may indeed be at a loss for any formal, a priori way of determining how far critical reflection can go, there is no real cause for embarrassment here. For the question is in any case best understood in a practical, or existential, sense—that is, as just one among many questions calling for deliberate collective choice, as conspicuous only for its unusual generality. Rorty puts the point succinctly: 'The pragmatist [e.g. Rorty himself] is betting that what succeeds the "scientific", positivist culture that the Enlightenment produced will be *better*. . . . [This successor culture would be one] in which neither the priests nor the physicists nor the poets nor the Party were thought of as more "rational" or more "scientific" or "deeper" than one another . . . There would still be hero worship in such a culture, but it would not be worship of heroes as children of the gods, as marked off from the rest of mankind by closeness to the immortal. It would simply be admiration of exceptional men and women who were very good at doing the quite diverse kinds of things they did.'<sup>48</sup>

MacIntyre's complaint against what he calls 'liberal individualist modernity', and against the 'modern self' corresponding to it, also rests on cultural considerations. The distinguishing mark of this 'self' is that it stands in a purely external relation to the various roles it may from time to time take on; that is, none of the activities in which it may become involved enter so deeply into it that to be severed from them would undermine its integrity.<sup>49</sup> The price paid for this radical emancipation from tradition is illustrated, as we have seen, by the sad fate of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, whom MacIntyre uses as a foil to set off the attractions of a revived Aristotelianism. And the practical implication of his own Aristotelian programme is that we should call a halt to the pursuit of moral and political 'transcendence' and 'devote ourselves to the construction of *local* forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained'.<sup>50</sup> As for Lyotard, we have already noticed his use of the word 'terror' to characterize the idea of enquiry as a unified dialectical process aiming, ultimately, at its own completion or closure.

---

<sup>47</sup> It is sometimes suggested that this kind of 'legitimation from within' could not serve to keep the Enlightenment project in being, since its internality to the discourse on which it operates prevents it from being a genuine legitimation at all. This seems to be the reasoning of Lyotard, who also says of (postmodern) science that it is 'incapable of legitimating itself, as speculation assumed that it [science] could' (PMC, p. 40, *emph. added*). But this comment would be entirely out of place, were it not for an (unexamined) assumption that any 'legitimation' worthy of the name requires access to an *absolutely* transcendent standard of validity, i.e. to something exempt from the finite and provisional character attaching to all human discourse. A related assumption can be seen at work in the attempt to discredit Enlightenment modernism by attaching fetishistic capital letters to the regulative ideas it invokes: 'Reason', 'Truth', etc.

<sup>48</sup> 'Pragmatism and Philosophy', in *After Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 55–6.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. AV, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> AV, p. 245, *emph. added*.

But despite the valuable reminder issued by postmodernism that there is no such thing as a 'pure reason' dissociated from any basis in local custom, I do not think feminists should be unduly impressed by the theory in this modified version either. I think we have reason to be wary, not only of the unqualified Nietzschean vision of an end to legitimation, but also of the suggestion that it would somehow be 'better' if legitimation exercises were carried out in a self-consciously parochial spirit. For if feminism aspires to be something more than a reformist movement, then it is bound sooner or later to find itself calling the parish boundaries into question.

To unpack this metaphor a little: feminists need to know, and postmodernist theory fails to explain, how we can achieve a thoroughgoing revision of the *range* of social scripts, narrative archetypes, ways of life, ways of earning a living, etc. available to individual women and men. Consider for example such mind-boggling, yet urgently necessary undertakings as the global redistribution of wealth and resources, the reallocation of work and leisure, the prevention of war and environmental destruction. Well, no doubt we shall be told that there is something *passé* in the very habit of mind which can still frame this kind of classically humanist agenda, given the alleged 'exhaustion' of all our political traditions (MacIntyre) and the extinction of any shared 'nostalgia for the unattainable' (Lyotard). But on the other hand, if there can be no systematic political approach to questions of wealth, power and labour, how can there be any effective challenge to a social order which distributes its benefits and burdens in a systematically unequal way between the sexes? Thus, although it is courteous of Rorty to include women along with men in the class of 'expert-rulers' who will replace the Platonic philosopher-rulers in his pragmatist utopia, it remains a mystery how we can hope to achieve an equal sexual division of power unless we are 'allowed' (by epistemology and political theory) to address the structural causes of existing sexual *inequality*. But this would mean an assault on every social norm or institution which rests on biologicistic assumptions about male and female 'nature'—on everything in our familiar way of life which can be traced to the entrenched functionalist notion that what women are *for* is to reproduce and nurture the species. And this in turn is far from being the sort of programme that could coexist with a meek, non-interventionist attitude towards the current inventory of social 'roles' or specialized functions. So postmodernism seems to face a dilemma: either it can concede the necessity, in terms of the aims of feminism,<sup>21</sup> of 'turning the world upside down' in the way just outlined—thereby opening a door once again to the Enlightenment idea of a total reconstruction of society on rational lines; or it can dogmatically reaffirm the arguments already marshalled against that idea—thereby licensing the cynical thought that, here as elsewhere, 'who will do what to whom under the new pluralism is depressingly predictable'.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> And of course those of socialism too, though it seems desirable to streamline the argument here

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Cameron and Frazer, *The Last to Kill*, p. 175. In its original context this remark refers to a 'pluralism' of sexual practice

## MacIntyre's Moral Epistemology

MacIntyre's discussion contains plenty of evidence, at a more intuitive level, for the reactionary implications of the proposed return to customary ethics. It is not that his portrayal of 'mythology' as a source of moral insight and guidance is so very wide of the mark phenomenologically. Who would deny the communal character of the ideas on which we draw when we set about the imaginative construction of our own lives as meaningful and unified chains of events? To be sure, 'myth' in this sense provides us with a more vivid conception of our own experience, it leaves us less bored and more in control. But a closer look at the workings of the process is less than reassuring from the point of view of sexual politics. MacIntyre pictures it as follows:

I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' We enter human society . . . with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world, and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and must go and live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are.<sup>33</sup>

This passage, if seriously intended, conveys the suggestion that the cornerstones of our mythical repertoire are the Bible, Grimm's Fairy Tales, and the Greek and Latin classics; and if that were the case, all good liberals would be bound to ask themselves whether the female half of the population can reasonably be asked to piece itself together out of the semiotic fallout from these sources. (Is it a coincidence that the only female role in MacIntyre's long list, for a human being at any rate, is that of a 'wicked stepmother'?) But, of course, the reality is even harsher. For our *effective* mythology, the one which actually determines the customary ethics of the (post)modern world, invites us to interpret ourselves and our neighbours in terms of a rather more topical range of 'imputed characters': good mothers, bad mothers, ruthless career women, gorgeous (dumb) blondes, ordinary housewives, women who are *no better than they should be*, loony lesbian feminists covered with badges . . . anyone who ever reads a newspaper or watches TV can continue the list.

We might wonder whether it is fair to place such a gloomy construction on the 'narrative' model of personal identity. Why should it not be possible to reclaim some of the available roles and turn them, in a spirit of subversion, towards progressive ends? Aren't most, or at any rate *some*, political cultures of the late twentieth century sufficiently variegated to supply alternative story-lines to people of a critical turn of mind (the tireless activist, etc.)?

---

<sup>33</sup> AV, p. 201

But MacIntyre seems to have pre-empted this move. For although he mentions the 'protester' as one of the 'stock character[s] in the modern social drama',<sup>54</sup> he consigns this type (along with the 'aesthete' and the 'bureaucrat') to a kind of limbo inhabited by those who have staked their selfhood on an illusion. These distinctively modern social roles, he suggests, can confer only a pseudo-identity on their bearers, since they all draw in one way or another on moral fictions spawned by the Enlightenment; in regard to the 'protester' the relevant fiction is that of *natural rights*,<sup>55</sup> the defence of which MacIntyre apparently sees as constitutive of oppositional politics. Any idea that 'protest' might generate a substantive conception of personal virtue, and hence a viable postmodern life-pattern, must therefore be abandoned.

No doubt it is correct to see feminism as standing in a predominantly negative relation to the culture from which it springs. To use MacIntyre's idiom, no feminist can be content with the range of 'life-stories' currently on offer to girls and women; on the other hand, if we set our faces against that particular set of mythological suggestions, this does not imply that we ought eagerly to look forward to some putative neo-Aristotelian régime of 'morality and civility'.<sup>56</sup> (In fact, the very words kindle an obscure desire to commit social mayhem.)

We are not, however, under any obligation to accept the hackneyed characterization of radical politics in terms of 'protest'. We can point instead to a positive aim which feminism has in common with other movements of liberation—an aim which, paradoxically, qualifies these movements as more genuinely Aristotelian than MacIntyre himself. For they are all concerned with the specification and construction of a *life worthy of human beings*: the very question under which Aristotle himself takes that of the individual 'good life' to be subsumed.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, this is the question at which MacIntyre baulks; or rather, his moral epistemology reverses the direction of Aristotle's by treating the individual enterprise as a source of insight into the collective one: 'In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. To ask "What is the good for me?" is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion. To ask "What is the good for man?" is to ask what all answers to the former question must have in common.'<sup>58</sup>

The effect of this reversal is to bar the way to political *theory* and to force the aspiring theorist back into the ideologically saturated field of 'mythology'—i.e., back to a choice between the various narrative archetypes furnished by existing society. Ironically, then, despite his use of Nietzsche as an object lesson in the perils of rampant individualism, MacIntyre's motives are not so very different from Nietzsche's

<sup>54</sup> AV, p. 238.

<sup>55</sup> AV, pp. 68–9.

<sup>56</sup> AV, p. 244.

<sup>57</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 2 (ethics is a branch of politics).

<sup>58</sup> AV, p. 203.

own—at any rate, in those relatively unmetaphysical moments when the latter is pondering the ‘immense stupidity of modern ideas’.<sup>59</sup>

### ‘Pluralism of Inclination’

Finally, it remains to consider the third of my postmodernist themes, the ‘pluralism of inclination’. I offer this (admittedly rather makeshift) term as a means of conferring some positive character on a development which has already been mentioned under its negative aspect—namely, the reaction against rationalist ideals of positive liberty and of the fully integrated human subject. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to review the arguments for picturing subjectivity in general as ‘decentred’ or ‘in process’: these arguments have in any case been clearly expounded for the benefit of Anglophone readers by linguistic, literary and cultural theorists.<sup>60</sup> Nor can I offer any general appraisal of the ‘philosophy of desire’ as a possible successor to the historical-materialist tradition (I mean, in inspiring resistance to agencies of political and social control). We can, however, take advantage of the fact that these strains of anti-Enlightenment thinking have already begun to make their mark on the kind of cultural commentary produced by British feminists and socialists.<sup>61</sup>

Feminism has always given a central importance to the politics of personal choice and taste, and it is therefore significant that over the last few years the movement has made large concessions, in its treatment of these matters, to the anti-rationalist mood of the times. Perhaps the most important trend has been a loss of confidence in the idea of *false consciousness*: in other words, in the thought that our spontaneous

---

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, §239; other relevant passages are GA, §356 and *Twilight of the Idols*, ‘Expeditions . . .’, §39. MacIntyre is of course aware of the contentiousness of his all-things-considered portrayal of Nietzsche as an *Aufklärer*, but decides to brazen it out (AV, p. 241); however, in view of Nietzsche’s clear perception of his own work as a logical development of the Kantian ‘critique of reason’, I am unconvinced that MacIntyre succeeds in locating any flaw in the self-consciousness of Nietzsche’s texts.

As a postscript to the foregoing discussion, I can warmly endorse these words of Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell in their Introduction to Benhabib and Cornell, eds., *Feminism as Critique*, Oxford 1987, pp. 12–13. ‘Despite many common elements in their critique of the liberal concept of the self, feminist and communitarian perspectives differ: whereas communitarians emphasize the situatedness of the disembodied self in a network of relations and narratives, feminists also begin with the situated self but view the renegotiation of our psychosexual identities, and their autonomous reconstitution by individuals as essential to women’s and human liberation’.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. for example Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, London 1985, ch. 7; Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, London 1985, pp. 99 ff.; Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso, London 1986, esp. Introduction, Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Oxford 1987, chs. 4, 5.

<sup>61</sup> For a non-feminist statement of the case against ‘political correctness’ in the sphere of taste, cf. Robert Elms in *New Socialist*, May 1986. Curiously, some of Elms’s ‘designer socialist’ claims in this article have a very Platonist ring (‘there is no divide between form and content, they are both a reflection of each other. Good things look good . . .’), but in his mouth these claims are far from bearing a rationalist meaning, since Elms assumes, in defiance of any ‘Platonist’ tradition, that what *looks good* is more knowable than what *is good*—that, in fact, appearances outweigh theory in the making of political value-judgements.

aesthetic and emotional responses might require criticism in the light of a feminist analysis of sexual relationships. To reject 'false consciousness' is to take a large step towards abandoning the politics of Enlightenment modernism. For it means rejecting the view that personal autonomy is to be reached by way of a progressive transcendence of earlier, less adequate cognitive structures: in our case, the transcendence of less adequate levels of insight into the operation of male power.

Many feminist writers now seem to hold that we shall be better equipped to think about the politics of personal life if we put the Enlightenment behind us. Influential in this respect has been Elizabeth Wilson's book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (1985), which deplores the 'rational dress' tendency within feminism and affirms 'fashion' as a (potentially) oppositional medium of expression: 'Socially determined we may be [writes Wilson], but we consistently search for crevices in culture that open to us moments of freedom. Precisely because fashion is at one level a game . . . , it can be played for pleasure.'<sup>62</sup> The same theme has been taken up by journalist Suzanne Moore, who has written in defence of women's glossy magazines: 'We are waking up to the importance of fantasy, pleasure and style, and to awareness that a politics that excludes them will never be truly popular . . . We cannot just pull pleasure into the correct ideological space through political intention alone. The idea that we ever could results from an air of moral élitism prevalent on the left and unwittingly absorbed by feminism.'<sup>63</sup> And more recently, Brenda Polan of *The Guardian* has mounted the following attack on feminists who reject standard notions of how women ought to look: 'The puritans whose criticism disturbs me most are women who are self-righteous in their espousal of the belief that lack of artifice equals virtue. Aggressive lack of artifice . . . declares a refusal to please, to charm, to be easy on the eye. It is an awesome arrogance; a declaration that no improvement is necessary, that the aesthetic consensus is mistaken and those who subscribe to it fools' (25 August 1988).

In all these texts the idea of *pleasure* is prominent—either our own, or, in Polan's cruder version of the argument, the pleasure we give others (thereby justifying our own existence and, presumably, gaining something of the narcissistic satisfaction traditionally allowed to women). The word 'pleasure', at all events, is apt to be brought out with a flourish, as if it clinched the case for seeing progressive or creative possibilities in something previously viewed with suspicion. The suggestion is that feminists have harmed their cause, they have *put people off*, by their gratuitous asceticism about make-up, frilly knickers and the like. But this invites the objection: whoever wants to claim that

<sup>62</sup> *Adorned in Dreams*, p. 244. Notice that in her chapter on 'Feminism and Fashion' Wilson does not limit herself to a simple critique of puritanism, but closes with a strong prescriptive message: 'The progressive project is not to search for some aesthetically pleasing form of utilitarian dress, for that would be to abandon the medium; rather we *should* use dress to express and explore our more daring aspirations' (p. 247, *emph. added*)

<sup>63</sup> 'Permitted Pleasures', *Women's Review*, August 1986 (order of excerpts reversed).

conventional femininity, even at its most abject, cannot be *pleasurable* for women.<sup>64</sup> Not long ago, it would have been widely accepted as self-evident that if for example I find that buying new clothes helps me to stave off boredom or sadness, that is not an argument in favour of shopping but a starting-point for reflection on my otherwise unsatisfied needs. If this is no longer common ground among feminists, it's arguable that the change is indicative not so much of an advance in wisdom or humanity as of a recourse to the consolations of the powerless—or rather, the consolations of those who have more purchasing power than power to influence the course of their common life.

There is, of course, something right in postmodernist warnings against insisting too much on 'ideological soundness', whether from oneself or—still worse—from others. No doubt there are pitfalls here; arrogance and self-deception are the most obvious. It would be sensible, therefore, to concede that there is no future in trying to conform on theoretical grounds to a definition of pleasure which is hopelessly remote from our current capacities for actually enjoying life. But if we accept that changes in these capacities can be emancipating—that they hold out a prospect of repairing some of the damage done to us in turning us out as women—then we are already committed to the idea that how things stand with a person in respect of her powers of enjoyment is a matter for political evaluation. And in that case, the occasional moralism or 'moral élitism' of radical movements will have to be understood as a vice of excess rather than as a symptom of fundamental wrong-headedness: the danger lies, in other words, not in wishing to bring our (felt, empirical) desires into line with our rational understanding, but in tackling the job in a ham-fisted way that is doomed to provoke disgust and reaction.

Again, the postmodernist celebration of pleasure sometimes wins a trick by appealing to the role of immediate feeling in subverting psychic order.<sup>65</sup> The idea of subjectivity as socially (or discursively) constructed, and thus as inherently fluid and provisional, opens up a world of possibilities here.<sup>66</sup> But if feminism disowns altogether the impulse to 'enlighten', it will be at a loss to speak the wish to make these possibilities real. Subjectivity can be as fluid as you please, but

---

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Catherine A. MacKinnon's description of sexism as 'a political inequality that is sexually enjoyed, if unequally so' (in her *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Cambridge, Mass. 1987, p. 7).

<sup>65</sup> Moore (op. cit.) tells us that 'Femininity is not indelibly stamped onto us, but continually in a process of recreating itself'. But this does not deter her from writing of 'the early seventies [when] some women were desperately trying to have the right kind of sexual fantasy that didn't actually involve any of the things that make sex exciting'. Despite the playful tone, these words clearly imply that we *know what it is* that 'makes sex exciting'. Well, *do* we know? It is too easy to say that if you are interested in 'sex' then you can't help knowing. On one level that is no doubt true, but strategically, a more fruitful principle for feminists (and other opponents of patriarchy) would be to assume that we still have everything to learn.

<sup>66</sup> These are the possibilities I once tried to capture in terms of Quine's notion of a 'pull toward objectivity': what this phrase suggests is that we can pull the other way, i.e. that there can be a conscious, politically-motivated resistance to the processes of socialization (cf. Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*, Oxford 1983, pp 58 ff., 194).

this insight—once decoupled from the feminist ambition to *reconstruct* sensibility in the interest of women—will no longer be of any specifically political interest. Its political significance lies in the implication that contrary to appearances (to the nightmarish uniformity, give or take routine variations in 'style', of the cultural representation of gender), we can remake ourselves as better—more autonomous, less pathetic—people: 'better' by our own present lights, of course, but that is simply a condition of engagement in cognitive activity. Did anyone expect feminist theory to wipe out overnight every trace of the mythology which is, sexually speaking, at the heart of things? And if not, isn't the present surge of enthusiasm for 'pleasure' really the sign of a terrible pessimism?<sup>67</sup>

The alternative to this kind of pessimism, I suggest, is that feminists should continue to think of their efforts as directed not simply towards various local political programmes, but ultimately towards a global one—the abolition of the sex class system, and of the forms of inner life that belong with it. This programme is 'global' not just in the sense that it addresses itself to every corner of the planet, but also in the sense that its aims eventually converge with those of all other egalitarian or liberationist movements. (It would be arbitrary to work for sexual equality unless one believed that human society was disfigured by inequality *as such*.)

If this is a convincing overall characterization of feminism, it follows that the movement should persist in seeing itself as a component or offshoot of Enlightenment modernism, rather than as one more 'exciting' feature (or cluster of features) in a postmodern social landscape. What does *not* follow is that it would be desirable for the women's movement—either world-wide, or in any one country—to be kept in order by some central authority (the 'totalitarian' spectre which post-modernists, in common with old-fashioned Cold Warriors, are fond of invoking). If, for example, European and/or North American feminism is alleged by black women to share in the racism of the surrounding culture, then their complaint rightly creates a new political agenda—a new set of pointers towards the goal of a genuinely 'heterogeneous public life';<sup>68</sup> and this sort of development certainly makes the movement (empirically speaking) less unified than before. But it does not prejudice the *ideal* unity of feminism.<sup>69</sup> Instead, it calls attention to a certain respect in which feminism has fallen short of its own idealized self-image as an occupant of the 'universal standpoint' (in contrast, say, to the traditional—male-dominated—Left). It is not 'liberal guilt', or conscientiousness in the abstract, which gives accusations of racism their urgency: it is the background commitment of feminism to the elimination of (self-interested) cognitive distortion.

<sup>67</sup> Terry Eagleton's words about the 'characteristic post-structuralist blend of pessimism and euphoria' ('Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', *NLR* 152, p. 64) seem very much to the point as a comment on the politics of 'crevices' and 'moments'.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. §4 of Iris Marion Young, 'Impartiality and the Civil Public', in *Feminism as Critique*. As should be clear by now, I am unpersuaded by Young's view that 'we cannot envision such a renewal of public life as a recovery of Enlightenment ideals' (p. 73).

<sup>69</sup> That is, it is not an argument against conceiving of feminism as essentially a single movement—because constituted by a single aim of ending sexual oppression.



## The Importance of Being Marxist

I hope that the almost Wildean title of my lecture is not misleading.\* I intend to be totally serious. If there is a place for irony in today's talk, then it is as one of those 'ironies of history' about which Isaac Deutscher wrote so prophetically. I have thought for a long time about what to say in this lecture. Usually, when prize-winners receive their awards, they try to give a very wise and profound speech so as to prove to themselves and to the public that they have not been given the award for nothing. I would probably have done exactly the same if the political situation in my country had been somewhat different and tanks had not yet become a common sight on the streets of many of our cities. But, alas, this is precisely how the situation is developing. Today everybody is expecting a person who has just arrived in the West from the Soviet Union to talk about current political events. And I do intend to speak, not about history, but about what is happening in our country today.

The time is not conducive to serious academic research. But does it follow from this that, in these stormy days, we can do without theory altogether. It would appear that a large part of the liberal intelligentsia, speaking from the rostrum of the Congress of People's Deputies, on television and in the pages of *Moscow News*, considers this to be the case. And, in any event, this section of our society is profoundly convinced that they can manage perfectly well without Marxism under any circumstances. Quite possibly they are right: they can do without it. But can society manage without it as well?

On the ideological plane, the first two years of perestroika were the revenge of the Sixties' generation. Representatives of this generation unexpectedly found themselves in the forefront; many of them found they had real power. Liberal communism, which had inspired intellectuals in the Khrushchev era and suffered a crushing defeat, after the intervention of Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia, seemed to have gained a second wind. People once again believed in the possibility of gradual reforms from above, and that a liberal market reform, envisaged as a second edition of Lenin's New Economic Policy and implemented under the guidance of Party leaders conscious of their historical

---

\* This is the text of the 1989 Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture, delivered by Boris Kagarlitsky on 18 September at the London School of Economics.

responsibility, would steadily and smoothly lead us to democracy. And the progressive intelligentsia would assist this process through advice and constructive criticism.

Unfortunately, such illusions were destined not to persist for long. It soon became clear that behind the general striving for 'change' stood contradictory interests; that the market reform being carried out by the authorities was of real benefit to the most modern section of the apparatus—the technocracy—to an alliance of a few international corporations with the traditional bureaucratic nomenklatura through the system of 'mixed enterprises'. Of course, there were some real and positive changes. The very fact that the Soviet people now have access to writings which were considered dangerous and subversive only three or four years ago must not be underestimated. This is not only important for the intellectuals. And, despite much bureaucratic manipulation, there can be no doubt that the holding of the elections earlier this year and the subsequent proceedings of the Congress and Supreme Soviet have stimulated political life and have allowed oppositional voices to be heard. But if you are talking about our daily life, about our everyday struggle for survival, you will find that perestroika has not been beneficial to the masses.

Sixties-style liberals found themselves on the defensive. They were being replaced by more consistent advocates of neo-liberal ideology: admirers of Mrs Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Whether we like these latter views or not they were, in any case, rather more logical than the views of the liberal-communists. Indeed, if you are in favour of the unbounded freedom of the market, of 'pluralism of property', then in practice this means creating a private sector and the sale of shares in state enterprises; if you see the only hope for the country in dynamic entrepreneurs and not in the working class, if you argue for the need to commercialize education and health-care, in short, if you do or advocate exactly the same as has been done and propagandized by right-wingers in the West, then what is the point of talking about socialism and a return to the 'true Lenin' or the experience of the 1920s. Consistent neo-liberals have seen in all these ideological attributes no more than a debt to tradition and political circumstances, a temporary screen no longer needed in the conditions of glasnost. Sixties-style liberals used to think differently. They truly believed in the possibility of combining liberal and communist ideologies. Nowadays, it seems to many of them that the supporters of reform are going too far. But ideological hegemony is no longer in their hands. And—worst of all—they are unable to propose any strategic alternative. Eighties-style liberalism appears to society as the rightful heir of sixties' liberalism.

### A Technocratic Orientation

The ruling group is inclining more and more towards a technocratic path by orientating itself to the values of Western society understood in a very narrow and primitive sense. The West to which the liberal elite and bureaucracy aspire is not a three-thousand-year-old civilization, but technology and consumption. The desire to be part of this earthly paradise dictates a policy aimed at copying Western

methods irrespective of the extent to which these methods are appropriate to our social, cultural and economic levels. Nowadays, there is little to distinguish the Soviet ruling elite from the pro-Western technocratic and modernizing elites in a majority of developing countries. Of course, nobody intends to repudiate socialist phraseology formally, but there is becoming less and less need for it. At first, while the ideological contours of perestroika were still being defined, Gorbachev and other official figures readily enunciated slogans like 'More Democracy Is More Socialism' and referred to the benefits of self-management or workers' participation in decision-making.

Now, this is all a thing of the past. The outlines of new ideological priorities are becoming clearer little by little. In the pages of the official press (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*) it is once again possible to read criticism of the Russian philosopher, Berdyaev, and of something he did not understand or did not realize. This time he is accused of not realizing 'the truth of capitalism' and of being unable completely to overcome Marxist influences in his creative work. *Ogoniok* and other publications tell us about the crimes of the Bolsheviks, who killed the last Russian Tsar. And criticism of Trotsky and Trotskyism is assuming a scale unprecedented since Stalin's time. This is in no way a manifestation of pluralism or evidence of the weakness of censorship. The censors operate and interfere when they come across something genuinely dangerous to the system—in its present incarnation. Journalists are even complaining that, at the end of 1989, censorship is becoming even stricter. Twenty years ago Isaac Deutscher spoke about the ex-Communist's conscience. In rejecting Stalinism, those ex-Communists do not just defend the values of the bourgeoisie but defend them with a traditional Stalinist intolerance. The ex-Communist's conscience has become a kind of collective identity of some of the people controlling the most influential sections of the official media in the USSR.

In 1989, the work of the well-known philosopher, Aleksandr Tsipko, on the 'sources of Stalinism' was published in several consecutive issues of the popular journal *Science and Life* (*Nauka i Zhizn*). As one has come to expect, the author sees the sources of Stalinism in Marxism and the socialist tradition which lead in a straight line to the Gulag. This is nothing new to a Western reader; Tsipko is basically repeating the arguments of Hayek, Solzhenitsyn, the French 'new philosophers' and many other authors who had written long before him (the only difference being that, in terms of literary talent, Tsipko is patently inferior to his predecessors). The article provoked an irritated reaction from sixties liberals. Otto Latsis published a response in protest in one of the most popular Moscow journals: *Znamya*. He referred to numerous incongruities in his opponent's article, to factual inaccuracies and to an anecdotal 'misprint' corrected by Tsipko in the course of publication: 'what was written as "Thermidor" should read "Brumaire".' This all looked quite convincing, but Latsis's article did not evoke and could not evoke the same echo as Tsipko's. It was not a question of the level of argument of one author or the other. Of rather more importance in this case was where Tsipko worked: *the ideological department of the Communist Party Central Committee*. This

affiliation no doubt explains why Tsipko manages to blame Stalinism on the Bolshevik 'Old Guard' and the entire Marxist tradition but carefully omits to criticize Lenin.

This new liberal ideology, circulated by millions of newspapers and journals, TV and radio programmes, cannot, however, in any sense, become the ideology of the masses. Sociological surveys are evidence of the fact that the majority of the population believes as before in the idea of social justice and demands greater equality. Practical measures to introduce market reforms have encountered resistance even where everyone is united in saying that such reforms are necessary. The great miners' strike of July and August showed a growing awareness of workers' interests understood in terms which would be a huge obstacle to market reforms as pursued by liberal experts. This all induces very sad thoughts among liberal ideologists. Sensing a threat, neo-liberals subject their own ideological positions to radical revision. Shortly after Tsipko's articles appeared, Igor Klyamkin and Andranik Migranyan came out in the press for the rejection, no longer of Marxism, but of *democracy*—for the sake of introducing a market economy. They consider that, in practice, the sole means of implementing a liberal economic reform is the creation of a strong, authoritarian regime capable of effectively suppressing the resistance of the masses.

This is nothing new for Russia. The transition of liberal-Westernizers to anti-democratic positions is absolutely traditional and customary. After the 1905 Revolution, a whole series of leading thinkers with left-liberal leanings—Bulgakov, Berdyaev, Struve and others—wrote in the collection *Vekhi (Landmarks)* of the necessity of a reconciliation with Tsarism and the preservation of a strict, authoritarian regime which could protect the educated elite from the wrath of the masses. The truth of historical experience has shown that the protection was unreliable. The revolution happened all the same and proved still more bloody than anyone could have predicted in 1905. The leaders of the Russian liberals—the Cadets—at the time of *Vekhi* distanced themselves from its authors but, after the Revolution, found themselves on the same side of the barricades.

### The Contradiction of 'Westernism'

History repeats itself—once in the form of tragedy, the second as farce. Today the farce is with us. The liberal public is indignant at Klyamkin's and Migranyan's treachery. But, alas, Migranyan and Klyamkin are a long way from Bulgakov's and Struve's level, not to mention such an outstanding thinker as Berdyaev. And their critics are a long way from the leaders of the Cadet Party of 1905, which united the most brilliant representatives of the Russian bourgeois intelligentsia of its time.

As it was, Westernist ideology then and now finds itself in an irresolvable contradiction. In the absence of social structures and classes of the 'Western' kind, the only force capable of securing a change in society in the Western manner, i.e. essentially of exercising force over

the natural process of social evolution, is the authoritarian, despotic regime which has nothing in common with Western traditions. To what extent is the regime prepared to assume this role? Of itself, the fact that the official bureaucracy, which had legitimized its domination with promises of taking the country towards prosperity via a non-capitalist road, is now turning to capitalist methods, is evidence of the system's complete historical and ideological bankruptcy, of the clear demise of traditional Stalinism. But a transformation of this regime into a capitalist one is highly improbable.

We are encountering the logical contradiction of a post-Thermidorian regime. Stalin's Thermidor, as with the French Thermidor, was essentially a *counter-revolution which grew out of the revolution itself and was to a significant degree the continuation and completion of the revolution*. Efforts to delineate Bolshevism from Stalinism and efforts to reduce Bolshevism to a precursor of Stalinism are therefore equally unconvincing.

In its turn the regime, which has made first-rate use of the revolutionary heritage for its own ideological justification, would this time be happy to dispense with this heritage, but is unable to do so. The promise of a 'non-capitalist' road is still essential for the maintenance of the system's political stability, even if this slogan is contradicted in practice. On the other hand, what we are witnessing today is not the formation of a bourgeoisie and capitalist relations in the Western sense of the term, but the appearance of a hideous monster, a kind of *negative convergence* which combines the worst features of both systems: Western and Eastern. We call this *market Stalinism*. How viable this monster will prove is a good question. Most probably, it won't last very long.

2 The thinking at the heart of this strategy of development is wholly traditional. A minority is ascribed the right to exercise force over the majority in the name of that majority; wealth, development of the economy and the construction of modern enterprises are seen as the sole criterion of progress. If the Bolsheviks viewed the economy as one big factory then, according to the new liberals, society and economy should be run as *one gigantic supermarket*. Symmetrical illusions and an oversimplified approach to reality link present-day market Stalinism with the early Stalinism of the 1920s, which formed within the Bolshevik Party. At the heart of both are distorted conceptions of radicalism and progress: in both, the adoption of such logic, if only by a part of the intelligentsia, is evidence of its profound crisis. The eulogies to authoritarianism and industrialism in the poetry of Mayakovsky anger his critics, who see in this a degeneration of his talent. But many of the utterances of today's commentators glorifying the right of the strong, carried away by the art of commerce and preaching consumerism as the highest virtue, sound no less monstrous. But farce is farce—there is no new Mayakovsky among them yet.

The crisis of the intelligentsia is now underway. The rejection of democratic ideals and ideas of the 'common good', which were crucial for the old intelligentsia irrespective of Party membership and which still existed in the sixties, means in practice a rejection of the intelligentsia

and its special place in society as the collective repository of moral and political values and the replacement of the Russian *intelligent* by the Western *intellectual*, only without Western education and competence. Having ceased to be an 'intelligentsia' in the Russian sense of the word and not having become genuine Western-style intellectuals, we risk extinction, having replaced ourselves with *nothing*.

### The Formation of a Left Alternative

Fortunately the position is not hopeless. The complaints of liberals and officials at the impetuous rise of 'left radicalism' are not entirely without foundation. The intelligentsia's new generation, like its predecessors thirty or a hundred years ago, can find no place for itself in the system now being formed. The revolt of the new generation is, at present, better expressed through rock music than literature (although, paradoxically, the literary quality of rock music lyrics has suddenly begun to improve rapidly). Evidently, we have yet to become familiar with the new literary names, but new political slogans are already with us. It is precisely the young intelligentsia which has formed the backbone of the socialist movement which is swiftly gaining strength. One rarely encounters criticism of the liberal myths in the pages of the censored press but it has become the content of the new *samizdat*. A left alternative is being formed.

The decisive battle for which we are now preparing is that of the municipal and Republican elections to be held over the next six months. It is not excluded that the apparatus will lose control of a number of large cities in Russia and of a number of Republics to the Popular Front movements. In Russia we believe that a coalition of Popular Front forces could even win a majority in the Moscow and Leningrad soviets. We believe that the Popular Front must then come up with its own solutions to the problems of everyday life, municipalizing and democratizing the economic structure and social administration.

There is a demand for socialist ideas in society. This is precisely why these ideas provoke such fear among the powers that be. Publishing Trotsky is more frightening than publishing Solzhenitsyn; the *Gulag Archipelago* already enjoys a circulation of many thousands, but Trotsky's main writings still have to be circulated clandestinely. But we must have a clear awareness that mass demands for social justice are no substitute for a real alternative that is at once cultural, economic and political.

The slogan of social justice is, in the strict sense of the term, not yet either a socialist or a Marxist slogan. Karl Marx's materialism did not at all assume humanity's simple dependence on the economy—this was known a long time before him—but rather a profound connection between the structure of society and the mode of production that formed within it. The task of socialists is precisely to change relations between people in the production process and not to redistribute property mechanically between rich and poor. This principled position has often been forgotten both by social-democrats with their

redistributive socialism and by radicals of all kinds, inspired by the beautiful utopia of universal equality.

We must find answers to many questions. Foremost among them is how to combine economic efficiency with the realization of the hopes of the masses for greater social justice. Here, partial measures to correct the 'extremes of the market' are of no use. The only way that we can see is to include market relations within an overall structure of democratic planning and self-management, thereby using them to serve the interests of society. The market can serve as a guarantor and defender of individual interests, but it can never automatically serve common interests. For just this reason it cannot and must not occupy a central place in the system of values of a society striving to be democratic and humane. Each individual, irrespective of their talents, earnings and luck, must have the right to a dignified life. A society which turns this principle into its everyday practice will be a socialist society. People who have made this principle central to their lives must inevitably become socialists.

Today, as never before, we need a radical system of values. But this is insufficient. We must understand the dialectic of development, move away from past dogmas, overcome the simplified vision of progress as the accumulation of material values. Today, our country and the world need people capable of thinking dialectically; people who are governed by the interests of the masses and who have confidence in the masses; people who can combine theoretical knowledge with activism. Perhaps someone can see another path—although, personally, I cannot imagine that such a world view could develop other than within the Marxist tradition.

Marxism, which includes the heritage of the 'classical authors' and revisionists of all kinds, the neo-Freudian researches of Marcuse and Fromm, the materialist existentialism of Sartre, the refined analysis of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and the contradictory but invariably stimulating revolutionary thought in the works of Trotsky, must, with all this richness, be viewed least of all as an aggregation of definitive and apocryphal texts. We need texts for one purpose only: to assimilate the lessons in critical method held within them, to form our own culture of thought and provide an impulse to a new theoretical analysis which will allow us to answer the questions facing us today.

### A Path to the World

Marxism is the path to European civilization, the path to a Western tradition, seen not as the shelves of a supermarket but as the real wealth of political, cultural and social experience in all its contradictoriness. While remaining ourselves we must overcome provincialism. We must open for ourselves a path to the world, which is not just the West. Finally, we must accomplish the historical and, for Russian culture, very difficult transition from 'Europeanism' and 'Westernism' to universalism. And Marxist internationalism can help us in this.

The slogan of a 'common European home', popularized by the

Gorbachev regime, today serves as no more than a justification for definitively turning our backs on the majority of humanity, who live, as is well known, beyond the boundaries of Europe. The task is not only to fight for a workers' Europe which must replace the Europe of the transnational corporations and bureaucrats, but to make this Europe part of a more just and humane world.

Fashionable talk about universal human values does not, in itself, help matters. In order to realize human rights in practice one must change political and social structures and, consequently, join in the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors, exploited against exploiters. This is the key principle of Marxist ethics, without which appeals to the common good are suspended in mid-air or become a justification for the very mercenary policy of the ruling social strata in Russia or many Third World countries who dream of becoming integrated into the world ruling class and of thus receiving their share of the global cake.

It is now time to reject the hypnosis of liberal words and make a choice. Either with the ruling elites against the people or with the majority of humanity against everything which prevents them from living as human beings. This question confronts all of us today in various parts of the globe. But it is posed especially sharply in Russia. *Russia will again become part of a single world; the question is what sort of world will it be. The answer to this question depends to a significant degree on us.*

# CATALYST

## SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

**'The left has been fighting in an arena designed by its enemies. Let *Catalyst* turn the stadium lights on, so that the strugglers see where they really are.'** NEAL ASCHERSON

### CATALYST • THE NEW MAGAZINE OF THE RADICAL LEFT • OUT NOW

Incorporating *Interlink* magazine. Published for the Socialist Society and the Conference of Socialist Economists.

**SUBSCRIBE NOW, AND RECEIVE A FREE COPY OF THE NEW SOCIALIST SOCIETY PUBLICATION**

**NEGOTIATING THE RAPIDS: SOCIALIST POLITICS FOR THE 1990s**

Subscription rates: one year (6 issues) £7.20 / two years (12 issues) £13.00

Send cheque/PO to CATALYST (NLB), 284A-286A SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, LONDON N4 2AA



Alain Lipietz

## The Debt Problem, European Integration and the New Phase of World Crisis

The market crash of October 1987 and the tremor of 1989 both prompted speculation that some replay of the 1929 crisis was in prospect. When the markets recovered, a cry of relief went up: 'The Crisis Is Over'. But in reality the crisis has persisted now for more than fifteen years. The US election year just postponed the problems, and we are currently entering a new phase, with many difficulties. According to a well-known Gramscian dictum, a crisis means that the old is dying but the new is unable to be born. 'The Old' is the economic order which, since the Korean War and under the aegis of the Pax Americana, allowed the developed capitalist countries twenty years of unprecedented growth. This order has now broken down and the search for a new model of growth, for a new international order, has been proceeding by a process of trial and error. The financial crash of 1987 merely revealed the obstacles which made illusory the previously attempted solutions. In other words, it signalled the beginning of a fourth phase of the crisis, one whose contours are as yet uncertain.

## The Dual Origins of the Crisis

The successes of the postwar period rested on two pillars.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, a model of development based upon mechanization and a particular organization of labour, Taylorism, established itself more or less fully in the capitalist heartlands and made for very rapid productivity gains. Second, these gains were partly distributed to the wage-earning population through a tight network of collective agreements and the institutions of the welfare state. This model, sometimes called 'Fordism',<sup>2</sup> was thus primed by the growth of domestic consumption. International trade also grew, though at a considerably slower pace, so that the ratio of exports to domestic production declined to reach an all-time low in the 1960s. Thanks to its unchallenged productive supremacy, the United States compelled all the other countries to recognize the dollar as the universal means of exchange.

Towards the end of the sixties this order came apart as the Taylorist organization of labour, in which the producers were allowed no say in the organization and improvement of the processes of production, revealed itself to be increasingly irrational. Against a background of mounting rank-and-file protest, engineers and technicians could not halt a decline in the rate of productivity growth except through ever more costly investments. The result was a fall in profit rates which, in turn, caused a decline in investment, growth of unemployment and a crisis of the welfare state. In short, it was a 'supply-side crisis'—or, in Marxist terms, a 'classical' crisis brought on by the rising organic composition of capital and a falling rate of profit.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, multinational companies deployed their productive apparatus across continents to boost productivity through economies of scale, and subcontracted production to a number of Third World countries in an effort to restore profitability. Over the next decade these would become the 'newly industrializing countries'. World trade began to grow much faster than each country's internal market, and the regulation of growth in both demand and supply increasingly eluded national governments. Three poles—the USA, Western Europe and Japan—became equivalent and competing powers. The oil shock of 1973 accelerated the dangerous coupling of national economies by compelling each one to export to pay for its oil—hence the appearance of a 'demand-side crisis'.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of the post-war economic order and of the first three phases of the crisis, see A. Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crisis of Global Fordism*, Verso, London 1987; A. Brender, *Un choc de nations*, Paris 1988; and Glyn/Hughes/Lipietz/Singh, 'The Rise and Fall of the Golden Age', in Marglin, ed., *The Golden Age of Capitalism*, Oxford forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> According to the French 'Regulation School'. For a basic presentation, see for instance Lipietz, 'Reflexion autour d'une fable', *Conjoncture Orange* CEPREMAP no. 8530, in English in *Studies in Political Economy* 26, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> See Lipietz, 'Derrière la crise: la tendance à la baisse du taux de profit', *Revue Economique* no. 2, March 1982, in English in *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 18 nos. 1-2, 1986.

## The First Three Phases

In the *first period*, from 1973 to 1979, the old 'demand management' recipes prevailed as trade unions, governments and international experts sought to maintain the old order. Action by the US Federal Reserve to increase the Eurodollar money supply allowed internal adjustments to be postponed and OPEC surpluses to be paid. These dollars were recycled to the newly industrializing countries, which equipped themselves with credit in the hope of settling their debt through exports to the North where consumption was continuing to rise, albeit at a rate slowed by half. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Trilateral Commission and the 'economic summits' of the seven major capitalist countries saw to it that each pole successively functioned as 'locomotive' of world demand.

Nevertheless, the neglect of the crisis on the supply side meant that this fairly cooperative management of world demand failed to produce any dramatic breakthrough. The decline in profitability continued and social conflicts were unable to prevent the inflationary dissolution of redistributive gains. As the supply of the dollar rose to finance ever more unbalanced activity, its value collapsed and its holders turned to the deutschmark and other currencies.

Nineteen seventy-nine was the year of the 180 degree turn for 'experts' and governments alike who, no longer feeling it possible to sustain growth through demand management, resolved to restore confidence among creditors whose capital was melting away. They tightened credit to get rid of 'lame ducks', thereby favouring firms with a competitive future. They dismantled collective agreements and the welfare state in an effort to restore profits and 'therefore' investment. With a reorganization of the jungle, 'natural selection' would take its course and the invisible hand of the market would find a solution to the crisis! This *second, monetarist phase* of the crisis, led by the Federal Reserve, lasted three years and came to a screeching halt, just short of the abyss, in the summer of 1982. The austerity imposed on the American people no doubt reestablished the hegemony of the dollar but at the cost of a recession unprecedented since 1930. All the other capitalist countries had to toe the line, compelled to balance their trade accounts through competitive recessions and to prevent the flight of their savings through very high interest rates. The NICs, finding themselves without markets just as their debt was exploding, were seized by the throat.

The *third phase* saw the emergence of a kind of middle way. The Federal Reserve partially opened the sluice gates of credit, while the US budget deficit set off internal demand. The United States entered a long expansionary phase, pulling the rest of the world behind it. But for a number of reasons that it is important to understand, this was quite different from the expansion of the Carter years. As soon as the first phase ended, two schools had arisen with policies to tackle the 'supply-side crisis'. Among industrialists, especially in the USA, Britain and France, some sought radically to cut labour costs by

eliminating job security, by out-sourcing, by transferring production to the Third World, and by increasing the level of automation. This may be termed the 'flexible-liberal model'. Others, mainly in Japan, Scandinavia and certain areas of Germany and Italy, came out in favour of a new 'social contract' to be negotiated on the shopfloor itself, whether on a collective basis (as in Sweden) or with a more individual inflection (as in Japan). Wage-earners were called upon to join the battle for quality and productivity. Partnerships between enterprises and universities at national or regional level (as in Emilia-Romagna) were strengthened in the same way. This may be termed the 'negotiated involvement model'.<sup>4</sup>

TABLE 1				
The 'non-exit' from the crisis in the United States				
Cycles	1948-66	1966-73	1973-79	1979-86
Profit Rates	8.9	7	5.5	5.9
Investment Rates	3.6	4.4	3.5	2.9
Unemployment	5.2	4.6	6.8	8.0
Productivity	2.6	1.8	0.5	0.9
GNP	4.4	3.2	2.6	2.0
Real Wage	2.6	2.1	0.4	0.0

The first three lines are average cyclical rates (%)

The next three lines are average annual growth rates (%)

Source: J. Bowles, D. Gordon, T. Weiskopf, Paper read at the 1987 Chicago Conference of the American Economic Association

The relative success of the second policy became apparent right at the start of the second phase, as Table One charting America's decline sets out. By 1980 Japanese productivity had overtaken that of the United States in the most internationalized lines of production (automobiles, electronics). When the third phase came into operation, the conjunction of lost competitiveness, growing budget deficit and the overvalued dollar fuelled a massive rise in the US trade deficit. This deficit was financed not through the issue of more dollars—and here is the second difference with the Carter years—but through Treasury borrowing from countries with surpluses (West Germany, Japan).

The third difference was that the push to recovery given by arms spending and tax cuts created millions of jobs in the United States. But in the absence of a dense network of collective agreements and social transfers, these jobs were low-paid and without security, their holders subsisting off a trickle-down from middle-class consumption.<sup>5</sup> A huge number of 'collective servants', such as parking-lot attendants, golf-course caddies or fast-food employees, throw into

<sup>4</sup> On the divergence of models for a way out of the crisis, see P. Messine, *Les Saturniens*, Paris 1987, and D. Leborgne and A. Lipietz, 'New Technologies, New Modes of Regulation. Some Spatial Implications', *Security and Space*, vol. 6, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> 37 millions (or one third of wage-earners) in the US have no social insurance.

sharp relief the image of the US as the 'Brazil of the 1980s'. Undergoing third-worldization, the American economy—including its industry—has undoubtedly enjoyed a boom, but on the basis of credit that is becoming more and more expensive.

As far as the NICs are concerned, they have all remained and will continue to remain tied to the currency zone of the dollar. But their evolution during the third phase has been sharply differentiated. Those which wagered their debt on the development of an export sector, striving for food self-sufficiency and promoting upward industrial import-substitution (South Korea, Taiwan), have been able to take full advantage of the growth in the American market and have been successfully servicing their debt.<sup>6</sup> But those which borrowed to finance domestic projects of dubious profitability and social usefulness have found themselves choking in the new atmosphere, even when they have a positive trade balance (Brazil: \$12-14bn. a year) which translates into a net transfer of surplus to the industrialized countries.

### The Nub of the Crisis

The world situation at the end of the third phase may be roughly described as follows. Washington places orders for sophisticated weaponry with West Coast firms. These firms purchase West German machine tools, their engineers buy Japanese cars or Korean microcomputers and tip their 'collective servants' who, in turn, buy Brazilian shoes. The Federal Government, unable to pay its bills with tax revenues, re-borrows the missing dollars by selling Treasury bonds to Japanese and German exporters.

In 1987 the US trade deficit was \$160bn., while Japan had a surplus of \$96bn. (\$56bn. against the USA), West Germany \$65bn., the OPEC countries \$26bn., and the non-OPEC developing countries \$36bn. The latter's current balance, however (that is, including debt service), is minus \$12bn. Asia's 'Four Dragons' had a balance-of-payments surplus (including debt service) of \$30bn. with the United States, and a deficit of \$22bn. with Japan.

American banks had gradually to hike real interest-rates to make up for the non-reimbursement of the bulk of Third World debt. The Federal Reserve did the same to attract savings from areas with a surplus. However, the rise in interest-rates was stifling economic growth throughout the world. When Germans and Americans quarreled over interest-rates in the autumn of 1987, this was enough for investors, now aware of the imbalance, to rush to re-sell their shares. The result was the stock-market crash.

Contrary to certain dire forecasts, the crash had virtually nil impact on the 'real economy', for two reasons. First, the monetary authorities around world reacted by pouring new money onto the financial

---

<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, Taiwan and South Korea benefited from a real land reform after the Second World War, and have taken steps to control their birth-rate.

markets. Second, the budget deficit of the US administration was not curbed.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the macroeconomic configuration looked much the same in 1988 as it had done in 1978: budgetary *and* monetary laxity. Monetarism was dead, expansion was secured . . . but a comeback of inflation was the new threat. And of course the imbalance of world accounts has remained, with US deficits stuck around \$10bn. a month. Throughout 1988 solutions were simply postponed for electoral reasons, against a backdrop of rising interest-rates. The fact is that a 'good' solution to a fourth phase of the crisis is very difficult to achieve.

The myopic solution advanced by all 'orthodox' economists and involved politicians is to call for a quick redress in the balance of accounts: 'The Third World and the USA must stop living beyond their means,' so goes the refrain; 'they must pay back their debt. Once they do, interest rates will come down and economic recovery will be just around the corner.' But this is utterly to misunderstand the state of the crisis. At the end of the third phase the broad outlines of a solution to the supply-side crisis are already in sight. In a more or less positive way—that is, more or less advantageous or disastrous for wage-earners, through German-Japanese 'involvement' or the US-British 'flexible liberal model'—firms have once more found some satisfactory profit-making potential. Now the bottleneck is to be found entirely on the demand side. The huge claims on future production accumulated by creditors will force most of the world (the Third World and the USA) to implement policies of austerity which, by slowing down the world economy, will make it impossible to pay off debts. Let me explain.

The problem is simply that 'to pay for one's debt' means to achieve a 'net payments surplus'—that is, a trade surplus on top of debt service. Jedlicki calculated in 1984 that for the Third World to settle its (then) debt of £600bn. in ten years, it would have to chalk up a positive annual trade balance of £124bn. net. The latter figure represents roughly the total sum of the annual US trade deficit, and it would have been necessary to set this aside for imports from the Third World. This did not happen—luckily for Western Europe and Japan! Today, Third World debt is over £1000bn. and the annual US deficit over £150bn., and by the end of the decade the US external debt will have matched that of the Third World. This situation can no longer be tolerated by the world financial system. If payment of the two debts is demanded (at the price of draconian austerity policies), then Western Europe and Japan will have to accept a deficit on the order of several hundreds of billions of dollars per year vis-à-vis the rest of the world (the Comecon bloc being out of the game)! This would be disastrous for employment, with the most likely outcome being utter chaos.

### Toward Devalorization of the Debt

As soon as the question is examined on a world scale—that is, from

---

<sup>7</sup> During the first two months after the Crash, the administration negotiated a slight cut in the budget deficit with Congress. A year later, however, it appeared that the yearly deficit had *increased* to \$135bn.

the point of view of global living standards, job security, world peace and ecological protection<sup>8</sup>—the logic of the macroeconomy implies, as it did in the thirties, the maximum devalorization of the debt. In other words, as a large part of the debt as possible should be cancelled. This process, which has already begun, poses a series of ethical, technical and political problems.

First, the ethical problems. To cancel debts 'officially' would create a credibility problem for future credits, quite apart from the fact that it might seem shocking to cancel debt that had been badly utilized. Human solidarity suggests that the debt of the poorest nations should be cancelled first. But should the debts of dictatorships be wiped out? Or, on the contrary, should the young democracies in Brazil or Argentina, for example, be appropriately rewarded? And what of the US debt—the thorniest problem of all? The most likely outcome is that a partial cancellation of the debt will have to be combined with a readjustment of export flows to benefit the US and Third World balances.

Let us note at once that in devaluing the dollar by half in relation to the mark and the yen, the United States maintained growth and partially restored its competitiveness, but above all it reduced by half its dollar-denominated debt! As to the various Third World countries, they have already cut back so much on their imports (often with dramatic social consequences) that their trade balance depends almost exclusively on what the developed world imports from them. For these countries the only solution is a devalorization of the debt—something which is already acknowledged among creditors, but whose implications they have yet to ratify for the debtors. In fact, when banks turn to the debt 'grey market', they take devalorization into account in exchanges of titles *between banks*. But even in transactions exchanging debt for equities or debentures *between banks and debtors*, it is rarely spelled out that the de jure debtor no longer needs to pay what is recognized by the creditor as a de facto loss.

As to the 'technical' problem arising out of debt cancellation, this of course has to do with the survival of the creditors. What will happen if devalorization becomes generalized through a new fall of the dollar, collapse of the Treasury bond market, and annulment of Third World debt? Insofar as these now-fictitious assets were used to sustain the world banking system, there would be a risk of bankruptcy for the big banks and a general breakdown of the financial system. A limited and

---

<sup>8</sup> The ecological crisis will not be considered in this paper. In fact, it is a consequence of a common characteristic of Fordism, Stalinism and current attempts to solve the crisis, namely, productivism. In the early 1970s, at the end of the Fordist period, critiques were made of the early consequences of productivism, and social movements imposed some forms of regulation. But the deregulation movement of the second and third phases of the crisis accelerated the evolution toward a catastrophic deadlock: destruction of the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, a growing statistical probability of major industrial disasters (Bhopal, Chernobyl, Basle, etc.) This new constraint, equivalent to the 'Great Plague crisis' in the last period of feudal Europe (mid-14th to 15th century), will be of overwhelming importance in the selection of a *definitive* way out of the present crisis. See Lipietz, *Choc sur l'audace. Une alternative pour le XXII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1989.

controlled devalorization of bad debts reassures customers—that is why banks the size of the Boston Bank are doing it. But the same phenomenon becomes dangerous if it is massive and general—hence it is forbidden to Citibank. To swap old debt for new debt or for debentures at the grey market discount-rate is possible in the case of Bolivia, but not in those of Brazil and Mexico together.

These problems issue into a political nexus. Since the end of 1988, a majority of analysts and policy-makers in the North have acknowledged that macroeconomic and human necessity of a large-scale cancellation of Third World debt. There is already a silent, creeping cancellation going on. But this majority must still remain hidden, because a simple global cancellation would imply a financial crisis. Even the project of a general debt-securities swap at the discount rate could not be accepted by the world elites without concerted pressure from debt-ridden Third World countries, supported by a coalition of non-governmental organizations and trade unions in the North. Only on this condition could the 'hidden majority' in the North come out into the open.

Such an impetus does not exist, however, partly because of a lack of coordination in the South and, worse, because of a lack of conviction among its elites. The amazing willingness of right-wing or even centre-left governments to 'pay for one's debt' has to be understood in light of the fact that powerful elite fractions in the South—financial intermediaries, export sectors, etc.—actually have an interest in the payment of debt. Moreover, the political difficulties of non-payment are often internalized in the minds of intellectuals.<sup>9</sup> These difficulties are real enough, but they can be overcome if the South unites, takes advantage of the 'hidden majority' in the North and puts forward a concrete alternative.

Rapid and all-round devalorization of Third World debt is, in fact, possible only if a supranational financial institution, acting as 'lender of last resort', compensates the banks which write off bad loans. This gives contemporary relevance to the question of 'Special Drawing Rights'. For if they were possessed of emancipatory powers (i.e., if they were real money) and issued by an International Monetary Fund operating in accordance with the principles laid down by Keynes at Bretton Woods,<sup>10</sup> such rights could first be substituted for unpaid and unpayable debts and, later, be distributed yearly according to the growing needs of the world's population. This would be a definitive blow to the hegemony of the dollar, which would in effect lose its status as the only world currency. Can the United States anyway avoid this fate for long? That is the question raised by the adjustment of the US deficit.

---

<sup>9</sup> I agree on this point with the statement by Jeffrey Sachs (*Folha de São Paulo*, 9 December 1988) 'Unfortunately, a major part of the entrepreneurial elites of Brazil, Argentina and other countries consider that to brave the bankers would be so daring that in the end they adopt a position more conservative on debt issues than the creditors themselves'.

<sup>10</sup> For the relevance of Keynes' views on the problems of international liquidities, see the collective work edited by M. Zerbato, *Keynesianisme et sortie de crise*, Paris 1987.



## The End of US Hegemony

However much it grates to see the US escape that austerity which the IMF has so cruelly imposed on the Third World, the fact remains that such an adjustment must at all costs prevent the onset of a recession in the United States—if only because women, blacks and Latinos, in short that entire 'Third World' inside the US itself, would have to bear the costs. Moreover, a recession in America would mean a drop in its imports, which would be bad for Europe and Japan, and worse for the newly industrializing countries of the Third World, for whom the United States is their best customer.

The twofold objective, then, would seem to be a cancellation of Third World debt and a non-recessionary establishment of equilibrium between the US and the two other poles of the world capitalist economy.<sup>21</sup> Washington first attempted to restore equilibrium by negotiating a dollar devaluation with its partners after September 1985 (Plaza Agreement). But this very solution created a series of daunting political and economic problems. Not only did it do nothing to reduce the US deficit vis-à-vis dollar-zone countries (hence Washington's protectionism towards Third World suppliers like Brazil); above all, German and Japanese creditors, seeing the devalorization of their dollar claims, insisted on converting them into tangible assets on American soil and demanded higher rates of interest for the US government securities that they purchased. They now typically hold these securities for no more than a few weeks before reselling them.<sup>22</sup> The dollar has lost its capacity to act as a reserve money.

In sum, the loss of American industrial hegemony, together with the deadlock resulting from the two Reagan phases, foreshadow an explicit loss of American financial hegemony. In Washington's quarrel with Bonn that set off the October crashes, one can almost hear, in echo, the British ministers of the 1960s cursing the 'gnomes of Zurich' for the latest palpitation of the pound sterling. A currency which melts away cannot remain a universal currency.

A non-recessionary re-establishment of America's trade balance, through the kind of fighting devaluation pursued in 1986–87, would thus be uncertain in its effects and fraught with danger for world economic stability. The preferred solution, in both social and economic terms, would naturally be an import recovery in Western Europe and Japan, and of course in the Third World. In fact, the US administration already conceived of the 'locomotive' role of Europe and Japan in the final retreat from Reaganomics in 1987, accepting that the salvation of the USA lay with a Keynesian policy on the part of its competitors. We shall return to the difficulties inherent in this strategy. But in 1988–89 the main steps were taken in the area of the

---

<sup>21</sup> For a similar position with regard to the USA, see S. Marris, *Deficits and the Dollar: the World Economy at Risk*, Washington 1985. Marris was the main economic adviser of the OECD during the first, Keynesian phase of the crisis.

<sup>22</sup> According to the Mitsubishi Bank, the turnover rate of securities owned by Japanese investors rose from 1.3 in 1984 to 9.8 in the first eight months of 1987.

Third World debt crisis.<sup>13</sup> Gradually Japan and the United States embraced the French position that, for the human, ecological and macroeconomic reasons explained above, as much of this debt as possible had to be effectively cancelled. Mitterrand had already adopted a twin-pronged policy: cancellation of public claims on the poorest countries, together with a plan for a heavily discounted debt-securities swap, financed by Special Drawing Rights and affecting private credits to Mexico, Brazil and other 'intermediate countries'.<sup>14</sup> Obviously France acted as front-runner because its own external account depended on a 'lax' Keynesian policy at world level. Besides, the Socialists were under pressure from Green, Alternative and Communist activists.

In 1988 the Toronto Economic Summit endorsed the first prong of the French plan, notwithstanding the monetary orthodoxy of West Germany and Britain. But the second prong remained a major outstanding question. At the end of the same year, Japan accepted the idea of a securities swap and offered to help Third World countries of its own choice to finance this through its yen surpluses. It was a position rather similar to the Marshall Plan: a newly hegemonic industrial country would help its future customers with its own currency. However, the great turning-point came in 1989 with the Brady statement, when the US administration also accepted the first aspect of the French plan for intermediate countries. It was now acknowledged that debtors would not have to pay for private debt, since they were unable to do so without suffering dramatic consequences. But Brady did not embrace the second aspect of the French plan: namely, the financing of a global debt swap by the IMF through Special Drawing Rights. On the contrary, it proposed that the private banks should themselves finance swaps on a case-by-case basis, but with a warrant based on an international fund financed by First World currencies.

The reasons for the US position are already clear. First, the United States had itself partly joined the ranks of 'weak', indebted countries. Second, it was still trying to protect the privileges of the dollar against the threat of Special Drawing Rights, and so was reluctant to accept a new Bretton Woods type of global agreement on the international monetary system. Its middle position, between the German-British and the French, was finally adopted at the Paris Summit in July 1989. But it was a rather unsatisfactory and unrealistic option. On the one hand, for reasons already explained, the banks are not willing to accept a *global* swap at the current discount rate on the debt grey market: their losses would be too heavy. On the other hand, a *marginal* swap would be insufficient and would hardly improve the debtors' position, since the cancelled element would be drawn precisely from that part of the debt which they are already not paying. To be effective, the swap would have to cover the total debt, at a discount rate greater than the de facto one of the grey market. Moreover, the

<sup>13</sup> On the diplomatic aspects of this major shift, see the brilliant study by F. Camé, 'Les dessous du Sommet de Paris', *Liberation*, 18 July 1989.

<sup>14</sup> A first and more ambitious version of this plan had been presented in Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, the French edition of which was published in 1985.

grey-market discount rate is a measure of the *current* capacity of a country to pay for the service of its debts<sup>15</sup>—a variable which depends on the macroeconomic world situation and, above all, on the willingness of the North to import from the South more than it exports. And this brings us back to the heart of the North–North macroeconomic problem: the difficulty of achieving a non-recessionary balance of US deficits through a voluntary increase in European and Japanese imports.

### Europe's Responsibility

Japan has recently made important efforts in this direction: revaluation, a rise in budget deficits for public works, an increase in wages and a fall in interest rates. But it is unlikely that Japan, an ageing medium-sized country over-equipped to satisfy internal demand, will ever become a major import pole. All eyes have therefore turned toward Europe.

The largest market in the world in terms of population and wealth, Western Europe has also been the largest stagnant pole since the onset of the crisis, the only developed capitalist region where unemployment has remained very high despite demographic stability. This paradox is not at all due to an incapacity for technological and social innovation, as the examples of West Germany and Italy show. Nor, within Western Europe as a whole, is it due to any special foreign-trade constraint forbidding the implementation of demand-side policies. In fact, as Table Two clearly shows, one of the main results of West European economic integration (both within and outside the EEC) has been a growing trend toward self-sufficiency, including in energy and foodstuffs. In world terms Western Europe is a surplus pole, West Germany's huge positive balance being chiefly a result of its intra-European trade.<sup>16</sup> A glance at any recent figures is enough to show that the only countries to have escaped stagnation and unemployment are those which do not belong to the Economic Community: Switzerland, Austria, Sweden and Norway.<sup>17</sup> There is no European economic disease, but there is a serious EEC problem.

A free trade zone without a common social policy, the Common Market hardly hindered Fordism's entry into its 'Golden Age' since all countries in the region were simultaneously pursuing a policy of developing domestic markets. Commercial imbalances were periodically purged by short-term policies to 'cool' the economy, or by devaluations, and 'escape clauses' were sometimes invoked to reestablish a measure of protectionism. In the 1970s, however, these margins of

---

<sup>15</sup> This statement should be accepted by liberal economists! One major consequence is that a debt-security swap at an insufficient discount rate would induce a fresh discount on the new securities grey market—hence the importance of an international fund warrant.

<sup>16</sup> See Lipietz, 'L'intégration du bloc européen. une solution pour la crise du modèle de développement d'Après-Guerre?', Eighth Brazilian Congress of Economists, Porto Alegre, 19–22 September 1989.

<sup>17</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the different rates of unemployment, see also G. Thernborn, *Why Some Peoples Are More Unemployed Than Others*, Verso, London 1986.

TABLE 2		
Growth and unemployment before '87 crash: 'the EEC effect'		
Country	Unemployment Rate (Summer 1987)	Industrial Growth (Summer 1987, 1980 = 100)
Japan	2.8	125.8
US	5.8	120.6*
Sweden	1.6	120
Norway	1.9	120
France	10.8	104
Germany	7.0	111
Britain	9.7	115.3*
Italy	10.5	98.3

Sources: OECD, OPEC

\* The 1980 benchmark warps the performance estimates of these two countries which were affected by the 'monetarist shock' right at the end of 1979 (-10% between 1979 and 1980)

manoeuvre were gradually abandoned just as the internationalization of the economy was fostering commercial warfare between member countries. Denied the possibility of modifying its parity by the rules of the European Monetary System, each country had no other option but to fall back on 'competitive austerity' to balance its trade. 'Each one must grow less quickly than its neighbour': you didn't need to be a game theory specialist to understand what the end result of this strategy would be.<sup>18</sup> With its EEC partners forced to monitor their deficits with West Germany, the whole of Europe is condemned to stagnate internally and is in no position to play the role of world 'locomotive' expected of it elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

In reality, Western Europe's growth is strictly limited by the growth of its most competitive and hence most surplus-productive economy: the Federal Republic of Germany. Yet ever since the beginning of the second phase, and probably under the pressure of the pivotal Free Democratic Party, West German governments of both left and right have opted for fiscal, budgetary and social 'orthodoxy' despite an unemployment rate of nearly ten per cent. It might be objected that Bonn's choice of 'slow but sure' growth is its own business, and that it can be justified by reference to the period of demographic implosion which the country has just entered. All this is true. Nevertheless, by virtue of the way in which EMS and Common Market mechanisms operate, West Germany's hegemonic role allows it to act as economics minister for the whole of Europe. Refusing either to stimulate internal growth, or to increase faster the free time of its workers, or to accept

<sup>18</sup> On this perverse 'beggar your neighbour' mechanism and its effects on 'left-wing Keynesian' policy in France in 1981-83, see Lipietz, *L'audace et l'aveulement, Sur les politiques économiques de la gauche*, Paris 1984. The 'grow less than your neighbour' rule was formulated by the minister of finance, Jacques Delors, in 1983.

<sup>19</sup> For a host of reasons, Britain and Spain accepted sizeable trade deficits between 1987 and 1989—one to three billion pounds a month in the case of oil-exporting Britain. But the German gendarme will soon force them to undergo the austerity treatment.

its partners' competitive devaluations, it condemns the latter to oscillate between stagnation and a deficit vis-à-vis Germany. In other words, it reserves for itself its partners' markets and seeks to use them as a vast outlet for its own productivism. Yet by preventing its partners from enlarging those same markets, it brings about a situation of medium-run deadlock. After 1992, when individual countries will no longer even have recourse to indirect protectionist measures to control their imports, the policies of the West German government will confine Europe to an ever more passive role.

At a deeper level, the problem resides in the fact that regions which have chosen different solutions to the 'supply side' of the crisis coexist within the same trading space but within different national units, separately fixing their own social policy and managing their own payments constraints.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, West Germany, the Netherlands and Northern Italy have adopted a strategy for increased competitiveness based upon the skills and 'negotiated involvement' of their workers. On the other hand, Britain, Spain, France and Southern Italy are playing the card of low wages and 'flexible' labour contracts. In these conditions, the negotiation of higher wages and/or shorter working time—the counterpart of workers' involvement in the first group of countries—is limited by the competition of the second group. Hence the endless battle between regions for the lowest labour cost by unit of product, resulting both in the EEC's global surpluses and in high internal unemployment.

To break out of this trap, to make Europe prosper in terms of welfare and free time while allowing for a slight deficit to facilitate a new world-wide equilibrium—this will require a profound restructuring of institutional mechanisms. It is not enough to rely upon the unified market of 1993 or the creation of a common currency, the Ecu: this *faute en avant*, eliminating the last defences against Bonn's recessionary policies, will only worsen the illness that has to be cured. On the contrary, the horse must once again be put before the cart: a common policy of social progress before the standardization of regulations, currencies and markets. This objective may be pursued in two complementary ways. (a) Deficit countries should be given back a margin for manoeuvre to speed up their growth and to combat unemployment through a shortening of the working day. This requires greater autonomy in the management of national finances, and the possibility of invoking escape clauses when overly 'generous' social policies pose too grave a threat to the balance of trade. More concretely, any moves toward the creation of a common external currency, the ECU, should be accompanied by greater flexibility in the Ecu exchange-rate of national currencies.<sup>21</sup> (b) Europe should be really endowed with common social policies, including structural transfers to deficit zones and the fostering of positive solutions ('negotiated involvement') to the

<sup>20</sup> See D. Leborgne and A. Lipietz, 'Pour éviter l'Europe à deux vitesses', paper presented at the conference *European Integration in the '90s: the Chances for a New Deal* of the European Association of Labour Economists, Toronto, September 1989.

<sup>21</sup> The strengthening of the ECU is anyway highly desirable as a way of shielding European currencies from the speculative movement of floating capitals.

supply-side of the crisis. The agricultural common market was the prototype of this kind of transnational and structural social compromise. The mechanisms chosen for this policy (price support for products, not income support for farmers) proved in the long run to have adverse effects, and a reform in this area has become an urgent matter. But there is no reason to abandon the actual principle of a guaranteed social income on a European scale; it can outrage only the forces of conservatism in Europe, which shamelessly manipulate urban prejudices against an 'archaic and useless peasantry embezzling funds destined for the industries of the future'. If agriculture is an arena of thorny negotiation, this is not because peasants are congenitally narrow-minded but because they have been the subject of an experiment with transnational structural and social policies.

This being said, a further step is required if Europe is to recover the capacity for initiatives to secure prosperity and full employment, to offer a pole of co-development with Third World countries, to participate in laying the foundations for a new international monetary system, and to contribute to the gradual adjustment of the American balance of trade. This further step is to lay the foundations for an institutionalized transnational compromise bearing on production and income norms, a set of Europe-wide rules, regulations, public and collective agreements. These norms will have two purposes: (a) to fix common medium-term thresholds for hourly wages, working time and ecological protection, involving management and local government in responsibilities for employment and inducing management in every region to select the most progressive variant of 'negotiated involvement' as a solution to the supply-side of the crisis; and (b) to set up regular flows from the richest regions to the poorest, in order to finance welfare and structural adjustments and thereby solve the 'demand-side' of the crisis.

If such initiatives are not taken, it will be best for each European country, as for the world economy, to return to autonomy within interdependence. Here one country stands out in showing a way out of the crisis without ever having really entered it: namely, Sweden. But will the social forces of Europe be in a position, between now and 1992, to reject the 'Common Market against Europe',<sup>22</sup> whose completion is taken by liberal-conservatives and unthinking newspaper columnists as a cure for all our ills? The victory of the Euroleft and the Greens in the European elections of 1989 may prove to have cast a ray of hope.

---

<sup>22</sup> The title of a (long-forgotten) book by Michel Rocard, Paris 1973.

Ted Benton

## *Marxism and Natural Limits: An Ecological Critique and Reconstruction*

Many on the left find a source of hope in the realignment of 'green' and socialist perspectives.\* I believe they are right to do so, and I share the hope. But it remains true that important currents within Green politics and culture are hostile to socialism (as they understand it), whilst the response of the socialist left to the rise of ecological politics has, in the main, been deeply ambiguous.<sup>1</sup> In what follows I attempt to do two things: first, to demonstrate that these tensions and oppositions have deep roots in the most influential intellectual tradition on the left, and, second, to provide some new conceptual 'markers' which I hope will play a part in facilitating the growing Red/Green dialogue.<sup>2</sup> Although some participants in this dialogue (rightly, in my view) favour a revaluation of non-Marxian socialist traditions of thought and action,<sup>3</sup> this should not, I think, take the place of a continuing and rigorous exploration of the limits and resources of Marxism itself. As I hope to show, Marxism still has much to offer, and what it has to offer is unique to it. Moreover, where the mainstream of Marxist thinking has been

wrong, or limited, its limitations have been both disastrous and widely shared, so that the effort of critical exposure is doubly worthwhile.

\* I would like to acknowledge the helpful criticisms of earlier drafts of this article by Michael Redclift.

<sup>1</sup> A classic expression of this ambiguity was H.M. Enzensberger's seminal 'Critique of Political Ecology', *New Left Review* 84, March/April 1974, reprinted in Enzensberger, *Dreamers of the Absolute*, London 1988. Five themes recur in the 'traditional' socialist critiques of ecological politics. The first, my focus here, equates the ecological perspective with neo-Malthusianism and rejects it as a 'natural limits' conservatism. The second sees in green politics a generalized and reactionary opposition to industrialism and technology as such, thus deflecting attention from the specifically capitalist character of environmental destruction. The third theme, closely connected with the second, accuses the ecologists of deflecting attention from class and regional inequalities in resource use and environmental destruction, in the name of a universal 'human interest' in environmental sustainability. Fourthly, this, like all 'general interest' ideologies in class societies, is a mask for particular interests: in this case an alliance of technocrats with affluent rural middle-class activists who share vested interests in ecological scare-mongering, and/or in the defence of a privileged minority life-style. Finally, ecological priorities are sometimes seen as elite preferences, matters of aesthetics or taste, which privileged minorities impose on the rest of a population, many of whom lack fulfilment of their more basic needs. The notion of a *hierarchy* of needs or wants, in which environmental preferences may be acknowledged, but assigned lower priority than more 'basic' needs for shelter, food and security, is deeply ingrained in 'traditional' left responses to environmentalism.

Green hostility or indifference to socialism tends to focus on the disastrous environmental record of the 'actually existing' socialist societies of eastern Europe, and/or the record of the western social democratic parties in governmental office. The Marxist tradition is widely condemned for its 'productivist' values. The 'eco-libertarians' among the West German Greens (see W. Hulsberg, 'The Greens at the Crossroads', *New Left Review* 152, July/August 1984, pp. 24-5, and *The German Greens*, Verso, London 1988, ch. 8) are particularly hostile to the fusion of ecological and socialist perspectives, but there is a more widely diffused tendency for 'green' writers to represent ecological politics as transcending the whole traditional opposition of left and right in politics: 'Both are dedicated to industrial growth, to the expansion of the means of production, to a materialist ethic as the best means of meeting people's needs, and to unimpeded technological development. Both rely on increasing centralization and large-scale bureaucratic control and co-ordination... For an ecologist, the debate between the protagonists of capitalism and communism is about as uplifting as the dialogue between Tweedledum and Tweedledee' (Jonathon Porritt, *Seeing Green*, Oxford 1984, p. 44).

<sup>2</sup> This dialogue has produced a considerable, and rapidly growing literature. In Britain, a highly successful national 'Red and Green' conference was held in London in May 1988, and much useful dialogue takes place in the periodical literature—most especially in *New Ground*, published by the Socialist Environment and Resources Association. The recent book by Martin Ryle, *Ecology and Socialism*, London 1988, includes an excellent survey and development of this literature, arguing persuasively that an ecological perspective is compatible with a wide range of social and political ideologies; the link between socialism and ecology has to be forged, it cannot be taken as 'given' or obvious. Pioneers of this project include B. Commoner (e.g. *The Closing Circle*, New York 1971, and *The Poverty of Power*, London 1976), A. Gorz (e.g. *Ecology as Politics*, London 1980 and *Paths to Paradise*, London 1984) and R. Bahro (e.g. *From Red to Green*, Verso, London 1984, and *Socialism and Survival* and *Building the Green Movement*, London 1986). J.L. Thompson (see 'Preservation of Wilderness and the Good Life', in R. Elliot and A. Gare, eds., *Environmental Philosophy*, Milton Keynes: Open University, 1983) makes out a valuable case for an eco-socialist reading of H. Marcuse. The late Raymond Williams authored an influential pamphlet entitled *Socialism and Ecology* (SERA, no date) and gave considerable attention to ecological issues in his *Towards 2000*, Harmondsworth 1985. Attempts have been made to synthesize ecology with other political perspectives, such as anarchism and feminism. The most widely known of the former are the works of M. Bookchin (see his *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, London 1971, and



I shall start with the statement of a paradox. Marx and Engels thought of their philosophical positions as naturalist and materialist. They tended to regard modern science as potentially favourable to—even a necessary condition for—human emancipation, they considered their own work to be scientific, and they aligned themselves unequivocally with the naturalistic implications of Darwinism in the evolutionary debates of the 1860s onwards.<sup>4</sup> Numerous statements of the leading 'threads' or 'premises' of their materialist view of history are likewise unequivocally naturalistic. The famous 1859 'Preface' (Marx):

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite social relations which are indispensable and independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. . . . The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of the social, political and intellectual life.<sup>5</sup>

The 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Marx):

Labour is *not* the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power.<sup>6</sup>

The 1845 *German Ideology* (Marx & Engels):

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature. Of course, we cannot here go either into the actual physical nature of man, or into the natural conditions in which man finds himself—geological, oro-hydrographical, climatic and so on. All historical writing must set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> (cont.)

*The Ecology of Freedom*, Palo Alto 1982), whilst the classic work on the latter theme is Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, London 1982.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Bahro, *From Red to Green*, esp. pp. 218–220 and 235. Raymond Williams, too, draws attention to a distinctively British tradition of environmental criticism of industrial capitalism, some of it explicitly socialist in orientation. See his *Socialism and Ecology* (op. cit.) and *Culture and Society 1780–1950*, Harmondsworth 1961.

<sup>4</sup> There is an extensive literature on the relationship between Marx and Engels and Darwinism. See, for example, G. Stedman Jones, 'Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy', *New Left Review* 79, May/June 1973; S. Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, NLS, London 1975; V. Gerratana, 'Marx and Darwin', *New Left Review* 82, November/December 1973; T. Benton, 'Natural Science and Cultural Struggle: Engels on Philosophy and the Natural Sciences', in J. Mepham and D.H. Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, vol. 2, Brighton 1979; and P. Heyer, *Nature, Human Nature and Society*, Westport 1982. For a rather more qualified view of the Marx/Darwin relationship, see G. Kitching, *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis*, London 1988, pp. 61–5.

<sup>5</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works* (hereafter *MWCW*), Vol. 29, London 1987, p. 263.

<sup>6</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. L.S. Feuer, London 1984, p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> *MWCW*, vol. 5, p. 31.

Vol. I of *Capital* (1867):

The labour-process. . . is human action with a view to the production of use-values, appropriation of natural substances to human requirements; it is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature; it is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every such phase.<sup>8</sup>

These, and many other passages in the works of Marx and Engels attest to their persistent view of human social life as dependent upon nature-given material conditions. The requirement that humans must interact with their natural environment in order to meet their needs is a transhistorical feature of the human predicament. This position is even to be found, notwithstanding the residual idealism of much in the early works, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844:

Nature is man's *inorganic body*—nature, that is, in so far as it is not itself human body. Man *lives* on nature—means that nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.<sup>9</sup>

This naturalistic thesis is complemented by a second—that the key to understanding the geographical *variations* and historical *transformations* in the form of human social and political life is to be found in the various *ways* in which these societies interact with nature:

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather, it is a definite form of activity of these individuals—a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part.<sup>10</sup>

If these are, indeed, central doctrines of historical materialism, then this is our paradox: ecology, considered strictly as one of the modern life-sciences, is the systematic study of the interrelations between populations of animals or plants and their organic and inorganic surroundings. Historical materialism presents itself precisely as an approach to the study of human societies in this perspective—as, in other words, ecology applied to *human* populations. Historical materialism, without distortion, could now be represented as a specific field within ecology: the ecology of the human species. Of course, this bold statement is open to a reductionist misreading. Compared with other animal species, humans are exceptionally adaptable vis-à-vis their environmental conditions of existence, and also possess the capacity for a generation-by-generation cumulative augmentation of their transformative powers. These and other features define the *particularities* of human ecology, and also determine the enormous causal

---

<sup>8</sup> *Capital*, Vol. I, London 1961, pp. 183–4.

<sup>9</sup> MECW vol. 3, p. 276.

<sup>10</sup> MECW vol. 5, p. 31.

importance of human environmental impacts on the ecology of other species. It is not my intention to deny any of this particularity of the human case. Although ecology is a generalizing science like any other, it deploys its general concepts in the analysis of the particularities in the environmental interactions of each species within its purview. This includes the human species no more, and no less, than the others.

If the point is taken, that the basic ideas of historical materialism can without distortion be regarded as a proposal for an ecological approach to the understanding of human nature and history, then why so much bad blood between Marxists and ecologists? Why have so many in the Marxist tradition been either hostile or equivocal in response to the rise of environmental politics in general, and, more specifically, to the challenge of the Greens? Why, indeed, have the Marxists themselves not taken the *lead* in providing strategically relevant analyses of the relations between environmental crises and the imperatives of capitalist 'development'? Of course, Green politics are about more than environmental issues, and there are many sites of tension between their perspectives and styles of activity and those of the class-based 'traditional' left. However, I think that differences between these broad cultural-political traditions on the questions of appropriate and sustainable forms of human social interaction with the material environment are at the core of their mutual suspicion. To achieve an understanding of one major source of these differences in the conceptual formation and development of Marxism will be the purpose of much of my argument here.

My central argument is that there is a crucial hiatus between Marx's and Engels's materialist premisses in philosophy and the theory of history, on the one hand, and some of the basic concepts of their economic theory, on the other. (The 'hiatus' to which I refer is internal to the 'mature' writings, and not to be confused with the much-discussed chronological 'break' between the earlier and later Marx—note the wide spread of dates of the above 'materialist' quotations.) These basic economic concepts mark a significant *retreat* from the thoroughgoing materialism encapsulated in the quotations with which I began. This hiatus deprives historical-materialist economic thought of the conceptual means to recognize and explain ecological crises, and so of a key element in any fully rounded critique of capitalist production. This defect in Marx's economic thought is not, I shall argue, peculiar to him. It derives, rather, from an insufficiently radical critique of the leading exponents of Classical Political Economy, with whom he shared and from whom he derived the concepts and assumptions in question.<sup>21</sup> It is plausible to see this failure as in part due to a mystificatory feature of capitalist economic life itself, but it is also connected with a general, politically understandable, reluctance on the part of Marx and Engels to recognize nature-imposed limits to human

---

<sup>21</sup> A brief but very valuable comment on political economy and Marx's relation to it, consonant with the present argument, is given in Ch. 1 of Michael Redclift, *Development and the Environmental Crisis*, London 1984. The argument is taken further in Redclift, *Sustainable Development*, London 1987—especially chapter 3. See also the very useful discussion in T. O'Riordan, *Environmentalism*, London 1981, Ch. 2.

potential in general, and to the creation of wealth in particular. The terms of the Marxian critique of Malthus can be seen as quite central to this theoretical trajectory.

## 1. Epistemic Conservatism and Emancipatory Critiques

Modern environmentalisms frequently evoke the spectre of 'Malthusianism' and, in doing so, call forth determinedly social-constructionist responses.<sup>12</sup> This broad pattern of 'natural limits' arguments in conflict with social-constructionisms is, of course, familiar from other areas of debate. It will be worth digressing very briefly to look at some of its general features before returning to the special case of the conflict between Marxism and Malthusianism. One well-known early critique of sociobiology as a form of biological determinism concludes: '... determinists assert that the possibility of change in social institutions is limited by the biological constraints on individuals. But we know of no relevant constraints placed on social processes by human biology. There is no evidence from ethnography, archaeology, or history that would enable us to circumscribe the limits of possible human social organizations. What history and ethnography do provide us with are the materials for building a theory that will itself be an instrument of social change.'<sup>13</sup>

Similar oppositions have been widespread in sociology, as between proponents of functionalist or structuralist positions, and those who have advocated individualist, voluntaristic, agent-centred alternatives. In psychoanalysis, Freud's well-known invocation of the unavoidable sources of human suffering is exemplary: 'We are threatened with suffering from three directions: from our own body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution and which cannot even do without pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless forces of destruction; and finally from our relations to other men. The suffering which comes from the last source is perhaps more painful to us than any other. We tend to regard it as a kind of gratuitous addition,

---

<sup>12</sup> Among modern 'neo-Malthusians', the Ehrlichs are perhaps the best known: P.R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, New York 1968; P.R. and A.H. Ehrlich, *Population, Resources, Environment: Issues in Human Ecology*, San Francisco 1970, and P.R. and A.H. Ehrlich and J.P. Holdren, *Human Ecology*, San Francisco 1973. Garrett Hardin's 'Tragedy of the Commons' (in J. Barr, ed., *The Environmental Handbook*, London 1971) and 'Lifeboat Ethics: The Case against Helping the Poor' (in W.H. Aiken and H. La Follette, *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, New Jersey 1977) bring out very clearly some political implications of modern neo-Malthusianism. The seminal Club of Rome study *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., London 1972) is also considered by some to be 'neo-Malthusian', presumably because of its emphasis on natural limits and its reliance on the idea of exponential growth. It does not, however, focus on population as the key issue ('The team examined the five basic factors that determine, and therefore, ultimately limit, growth on this planet—population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production, and pollution', pp. 11–12). A useful recent discussion of neo-Malthusianism in relation to world poverty and famine is O. O'Neill, *Facts of Hunger*, London 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Sociobiology Study Group of Science for the People, in A.L. Caplan, ed., *The Sociobiology Debate*, New York 1978, pp. 289–90.

although it cannot be any less fatefully inevitable than the suffering which comes from elsewhere.<sup>14</sup>

In view of this widespread pattern of argument, it is useful to distinguish two strains of conservatism: evaluative and epistemic. The former directly advocates patriarchy, inequality, discipline, continuity or whatever as intrinsically desirable, as constitutive of the good life. By contrast, what I call 'epistemic' conservatism may well share, or affect to share, the egalitarian, communitarian or emancipatory value-orientations of the radical. Conservative conclusions are drawn, however reluctantly, from what are held to be unalterable features of the human predicament: from our inner natures, from external nature, or from a combination of the two. Hobbes, Malthus, the later Freud, Durkheim and many others are open to interpretation as epistemic conservatives in this sense.

Epistemic conservatisms have provided the most challenging objections to emancipatory projects and it is arguable that most radical theories are shaped in important ways by the strategic requirement that they avoid these objections. There is, indeed, a deeper affinity between emancipatory thought and epistemic conservatism. Both perspectives recognize a conflict between persistent, deep-rooted human aspirations on the one hand, and structures of internal and/or external constraint on the other. This is a necessary moment in any emancipatory perspective if it is effectively to *indict* the existing order. Where emancipatory thought parts company with epistemic conservatism is in its insistence that the structures of constraint which frustrate human potential are neither universal nor necessary: there are reasonable grounds for hope.

It is important for my subsequent argument to distinguish two alternative directions of emancipatory response to epistemic conservatism. The first, which I will call Utopian, explicitly or implicitly denies the independent reality of the sources of constraint identified by the epistemic conservative. These oppressive structures of existence take on the *appearance* of independence, and can oppress us only insofar as we take the appearance for reality. Lukács's argument in 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat'<sup>15</sup> is often read in this way, and the general intellectual strategy has had wide currency in humanist sociologies. A Utopian rejection of biological limits to human social possibilities has been widespread among opponents of biological determinisms, and psychoanalysis, too, is susceptible of readings in which unconscious determinants of conscious life are thought of as susceptible of reintegration within the autonomous ego.<sup>16</sup>

To be contrasted with Utopian emancipatory perspectives are Realist

---

<sup>14</sup> 'Civilization and its Discontents', in S. Freud, *Civilisation, Sexuality and Religion*, Harmondsworth 1985, p. 264.

<sup>15</sup> In G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, London 1971.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Russell Kear's telling critique of Habermas's use of psychoanalysis in *The Politics of Social Theory: Habermas, Freud and the Critique of Postmodernism*, Oxford 1981, Ch. 4. See also Barry Richards, 'The Eupsychean Impulse: Psychoanalysis and Left Politics since '68', *Radical Philosophy* 48, Spring 1988.

ones which assert or recognize the purpose-independent reality of the structures, forces or mechanisms which limit human aspirations.<sup>17</sup> The hope of emancipation is sustained by an account of these sources of constraint which renders them *at least partially* available for transformation by human intentional action. To be 'real', even to be 'natural', is not necessarily to be unchangeable! But what a Realist emancipatory perspective carries with it is a commitment to viewing transformative action in the context of its real, purpose-independent conditions of possibility, and its associated limits of effectiveness, its liability to be frustrated by unforeseen consequences, and so on. At the limit, a Realist emancipatory perspective must be open to the empirical possibility of a reconciliation with epistemic conservatism—in the face of realities which genuinely are invulnerable to human intentionality, adaptation by modifying or even abandoning our initial aspirations is itself to be recognized as a form of emancipation.

## 2. Marx and Engels Against Malthus

To return, now, to my central theme, my argument is that the economic thought of Marx and Engels includes important elements of a Utopian over-reaction to Malthusian epistemic conservatism. The overall position of Marx and Engels is an unstable and contradictory compromise between Realist and Utopian elements.

The broad features of the controversy over Malthus's 'law of population' are well known and I shall not rehearse them in detail.<sup>18</sup> As a true epistemic conservative, Malthus claimed to share his opponents' enthusiasm for a new and just order of society: 'I have read some of the speculations on the perfectibility of man and of society with great pleasure. I have been warmed and delighted with the enchanting picture which they hold forth. I ardently wish for such improvements. But I see great, and, to my understanding, unconquerable difficulties in the way to them.'<sup>19</sup> Foremost among the 'speculations' of which

---

<sup>17</sup> The approach developed here has close affinities with the work of Russell Keat and John Urry, Roy Bhaskar, Sue Clegg, Andrew Sayer, John Lovering, Andrew Collier, William Outhwaite, Anne Witz and others. I have been greatly helped in working out this argument by reading their works, and by personal conversations. I am especially indebted to the participants in the first 'Reds and Greens' Conference, 14–15 May 1988, the annual conferences on 'Realism and the Human Sciences', and the *Radical Philosophy* day conference on 'Reason, Hope and Revolution', 5 November 1988 for helpful criticism of these ideas. The form of realism here advocated has been furthest developed by Roy Bhaskar, most especially in his books *A Realist Theory of Science*, 2nd Ed., Brighton 1978; *The Possibility of Naturalism*, Brighton 1979; and *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, Verso, London 1986. For my purposes here, Bhaskar's position involves concessions to anti-naturalism which undermine its great usefulness in other respects. See T. Benton, 'Realism and Social Science', *Radical Philosophy* 27, Spring 1981, reprinted in Edgley & Osborne, eds, *Radical Philosophy Reader*, Verso, 1985. My approach here contrasts significantly with the 'transformational model of social activity' developed by Bhaskar, especially in Chapter 4 of *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, though I do not engage with his position here. I have also benefited greatly from conversations with Olga Ojeda on these and related issues.

<sup>18</sup> A very useful commentary, which focuses on the responses of Malthus's contemporaries, is K. Smith, *The Malthusian Controversy*, London 1951.

<sup>19</sup> T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. A.G.N. Flew, Harmondsworth 1970, p. 69.

Malthus spoke in his first *Essay* were, of course, the egalitarian and communitarian proposals of Godwin and Condorcet in the years following the French Revolution. The 'unconquerable difficulties' reduced to the elementary matter of a necessarily adverse relationship between the tendency of population to rise geometrically and that of food-supply to rise at best only arithmetically. This inescapable feature of the human condition was sufficient to lay waste to all and any of the grand visions of an abundant egalitarian and cooperative commonwealth. The misery and poverty arising from the pressure of population upon the supply of means of subsistence must *necessarily* affect a large part of human kind notwithstanding the best intentions of would-be reformers.

Marx and Engels were fiercely critical of Malthus's 'law' and there are numerous references to it throughout their work.<sup>20</sup> Polemics aside, their critique was double-pronged: first, a series of arguments against the universality and necessity of the law, and, second, a reconceptualization and explanation of the phenomenon—a relative surplus population—which Malthus had addressed, as an effect not of the human predicament, but of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation. In his (1844) 'Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy' Engels argued that it was 'absurd to talk of over-population' when no more than one third of the earth's surface was cultivated, and an application of 'improvements already known' could raise the production of this third sixfold.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the geometrical rise in population was matched by a geometrical ratio in the advancement of science and, by implication, in its application in agricultural production: 'And what is impossible to science?' As to the geometrical ratio of population itself, Engels made use of Malthus's recognition of the role of 'moral restraint' (which was emphasized in later versions of the *Essay*): 'We derive from it [the Malthusian theory] the most powerful economic arguments for a social transformation. For even if Malthus were completely right, this transformation would have to be undertaken straight away; for only this transformation, only the education of the masses which it provides, makes possible that moral restraint of the propagative instinct which Malthus himself presents as the most effective and easiest remedy for over-population.'<sup>22</sup>

What these arguments leave rather unclear is whether Marx and Engels did recognize any ultimate natural limits to population, or to human transformative powers vis-à-vis nature. In a very useful discussion of this issue, K.J. Walker has argued that Marx and Engels did, in fact, admit the possibility of such outer limits.<sup>23</sup> This would,

<sup>20</sup> These are collected in R.L. Meek, ed., *Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb*, Berkeley 1971—essentially a newly titled reprint of Meek, ed., *Marx and Engels on Malthus* (1951), with a foreword by S. Weissman situating the text in relation to the neo-Malthusian challenge of P.R. Ehrlich's best-seller, *The Population Bomb*.

<sup>21</sup> MECW vol. 3, p. 440.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>23</sup> K.J. Walker, 'Ecological Limits and Marxian Thought', *Politics* xiv (1) May 1979, p.

indeed, be consistent with the central premisses of historical materialism. However, the emphasis of their arguments, understandable enough, was that such limits, if they existed, were very far from having been reached at that time, and were certainly not responsible for the prevailing poverty and misery. At most, Marx and Engels recognized 'the abstract possibility' that limits would have to be set to the human population, but this was so distant as to be, for current practical purposes, irrelevant. Indeed, in a passage just prior to that quoted above, Engels goes so far as to say: 'Thanks to this theory, as to economics as a whole, our attention has been drawn to the productive power of the earth and of mankind; and after overcoming this economic despair we have been made *for ever secure against the fear of over-population*.'<sup>24</sup>

The Malthusian 'law' is not, then, to be accepted as a universal law of nature, but this is not to deny the actuality of the phenomena which the 'law' is intended to explain. Like all economic laws, Malthus's is associated with determinate social conditions. Each stage of historical development has its own law of population, and what is valid in the Malthusian population doctrine is restricted to its status as a characterization of the necessity of what Marx and Engels variously call a 'reserve army of labour' or 'relative surplus population' to specifically capitalist accumulation. Correctly formulated, the law referred to the excessive numbers of wage labourers in relation to the means of *employment* (not, directly at least, *subsistence*), and the explanation given to the phenomenon in *Capital* is that it results from the long-run tendency of variable capital to decrease as a proportion of total capital employed.<sup>25</sup>

This dual strategy against Malthus—denial of *naturally* imposed limits, but recognition of historically transitory *socially* imposed limits—has clear political consequences. It is equally apparent that the stand taken against Malthus is intimately bound up with Marx's and Engels's perceptions of these political consequences: 'But if this theory is correct, then again I cannot abolish the law even if I abolish wage labour a hundred times over, because the law then governs not only the system of wage labour but *every* social system. Basing themselves directly on this, the economists have been proving for fifty years and more that socialism cannot abolish poverty, *which has its basis in nature*, but can only make it *general*, distribute it simultaneously over the whole surface of society!'<sup>26</sup> For political reasons, then, Marx and Engels were strongly, and understandably, predisposed against 'natural-limits' arguments, and they rightly saw the Malthusian population doctrine as such a 'natural-limits' argument.

### 3. Natural Limits in Ricardo's Political Economy

On this question Marx and Engels were on the same side as Ricardo.

<sup>24</sup> *MBCW* vol 3, p 439, emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> *Capital* Vol. 1, p. 628

<sup>26</sup> From Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Feuer, ed., op cit., p. 165.



Though the latter incorporated a qualified form of Malthus's law into his political economy, he was a determined critic of Malthus on a range of other issues. The most relevant of these to our concerns were Malthus's theory of rent and his notion of 'unproductive consumption'. On the vexed question of rent, Malthus argued that it did not derive from monopoly ownership by the landlords, but was rather a result of that special 'quality of the earth by which it can be made to yield a greater portion of the necessaries of life than is required for the maintenance of the persons employed on the land'.<sup>27</sup> Ricardo's view was that 'rent... is a creation of value, but not a creation of wealth'<sup>28</sup>: it is 'nothing more than a revenue transferred from one class to another'.<sup>29</sup> A second bone of contention was Malthus's view that current economic problems could be attributed to over-rapid capital accumulation, outstripping the growth of purchasing power. Since this tendency was inherent to capitalism, there was a permanent requirement for a class of unproductive consumers to sustain effective demand. Both arguments were recognized by Ricardo to be apologetics on behalf of the landlord class, whose interests were antagonistic to those 'of every other class in the community'.<sup>30</sup> In particular, the rent on land and landlord's consumption was seen as an unnecessary limit on the accumulation of capital: 'for the country would have a greater disposable fund if its land were of a better quality, and it could employ the same capital without generating a rent'.<sup>31</sup>

Ricardo, like Marx and Engels, was reluctant to admit any important role for nature-imposed limits. As we shall see, in several important respects Marx and Engels simply took over and developed those elements of his political economy in which this position was most clearly expressed. Let us take first what Ricardo has to say in the chapters of his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* which deal, respectively, with value, rent and capital accumulation. Ricardo follows Adam Smith in distinguishing 'value in use' from 'exchangeable value'. Exchangeable value, he says, has two sources: relative scarcity of the goods concerned, and the labour, or trouble of acquiring them. He recognizes that, for a small class of goods, scarcity as such directly affects their value, independently of the amount of labour expended in acquiring them: their supply is subject to absolute (qualitative or quantitative) limits, not alterable by any amount of human effort. But Ricardo is quite explicit that this applies to a small minority of goods only, and that for the great majority of commodities in circulation, exchangeable value expresses the quantity of labour expended in their 'acquisition' (or production). He is equally clear that the economic concepts and laws he is about to expound apply *only* to this large class of commodities: 'In speaking then of commodities, of their exchangeable value, and of the laws which regulate their relative prices, we

<sup>27</sup> Malthus, as quoted in D. Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, ed. R.M. Hartwell, Harmondsworth 1971, p. 393

<sup>28</sup> Ricardo, in *ibid.*, p. 392

<sup>29</sup> Buchanan, quoted approvingly in Ricardo, *ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>30</sup> Ricardo quote in Meek (op. cit.), p. 13, to which this account of the Ricardo/Malthus relationship is considerably indebted.

<sup>31</sup> Ricardo, op. cit., p. 392.

mean always such commodities only as can be increased in quantity by the exertion of human industry, and on the production of which competition operates without restraint.<sup>32</sup> Natural scarcity of a resource, therefore, is excluded from the purview of economic analysis except when and insofar as it is manifested in the form of an extra expenditure of the labour of acquiring it.

When Ricardo comes to discuss the source of rent, he poses the question why it is possible to charge rent on land, but not on other gifts of nature such as air, water, the pressure of the atmosphere, and so on, which are likewise involved in the creation of wealth. The answer is to be found in the fact that these 'free' elements in production exist in boundless quantity and are therefore not susceptible to private appropriation: 'With a given quantity of materials, and with the assistance of the pressure of the atmosphere, and the elasticity of steam, engines may perform work, and abridge human labour to a very great extent; but no charge is made for the use of these natural aids, because they are inexhaustible, and at every man's disposal. In the same manner the brewer, the distiller, the dyer, make incessant use of the air and water for the production of their commodities; but as the supply is boundless, they bear no price.'<sup>33</sup> These naturally given material conditions of production do not enter into the costs of production, nor can they impose natural limits on production. Ricardo treats rent on mines, like rent on land, as a revenue accruing from private appropriation, not from value created by the landlord. In mining for metals, as in agriculture, exchangeable value depends on labour-time only. Scarcity as such does not enter into economic calculation: its effect on exchange-value is solely by way of its impact on the labour necessary for its extraction.

Our final illustration comes from Ricardo's chapter on the 'Effects of Accumulation'. Here he considers another possible source of limits to the accumulation of capital, this time imposed by our internal natures: the possibility that there might be natural limits to the *demand* for commodities, with consequent 'glut' and a fall in the rate of profit on investments. Ricardo follows Smith in his treatment of this problem: 'Adam Smith has justly observed "that the desire of food is limited in every man by the narrow capacity of the human stomach, but the desire of the conveniences and ornaments of building, dress, equipage, and household furniture, seems to have no limit or certain boundary." Nature then has limited the amount of capital which can at any one time be profitably engaged in agriculture, but she has placed no limits to the amount of capital that may be employed in procuring "the conveniences and ornaments" of life.'<sup>34</sup> With respect to demand, then, Ricardo explicitly makes the freedom of capital accumulation from natural limits dependent upon an assumption about human nature: limits to our appetite for food are compensated by limitless desires for 'ornaments and conveniences' of life.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

Ricardo sometimes speaks of this limitlessness of desire as 'occasioned by production' and sometimes as something 'implanted in every man's breast'.<sup>35</sup> Either way, he does not see the assumption as problematic.

Ricardo does, however, recognize a potential limit to accumulation in the possibility that wages might, in the long run, rise in relation to profits to the point where the motive for investment would cease. Under what conditions might there be such a long-run rise in wages? Only, Ricardo argues, as a consequence of a similarly long-run decline in the 'facility of producing the food and necessities of the labourer'.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, then, Ricardo does recognize a possible natural limit to accumulation—a concession to Malthus's population doctrine, if not to the latter's views on rent and unproductive consumption.

In conclusion, then, we can say that Ricardo's political economy recognizes several classes of nature-given preconditions for the conduct and expansion of capitalist economic activity. The possibility that capitalist economic activity might face natural limits as a result of a non-satisfaction of these preconditions (relatively or absolutely) is, however, either marginalized or outright excluded by the theoretical moves just discussed. These moves are of three basic kinds: (1) postulating limitless quantities of some natural conditions/resources; (2) choosing to disregard, as of little actual economic significance, the fact that some desired natural goods are absolutely limited in quantity; and (3) recognizing some natural limits only indirectly, by way of their manifestations within the social-relational system of economic life (as a rise in wages relative to profit, or as an increase in the value of certain commodities).

#### 4. Natural Limits in Marx and Engels: An Ecological Critique

In this part of my argument, I will attempt to show that certain key concepts of the economic theory of *Capital* involve a series of related conflation, imprecisions and lacunae, the net effect of which is to render the theory incapable of adequately conceptualizing the ecological conditions and limits of human need-meeting interactions with nature. I also begin to indicate ways in which these theoretical defects might be corrected. It is, perhaps, worth emphasizing that my main aim is the constructive one of using Marx's ideas as conceptual 'raw materials' in order to move towards an ecologically adequate economic theory. I make no claim to expository balance. I have acknowledged already, and will do so later on in this paper, that there is much in the corpus of Marxian historical materialism which is readily compatible with an ecological perspective. But my focus here is quite deliberately upon those features of the economic theory which demand critical transformation if they are to meet this requirement. Even here, my view is (though I do not argue for it) that Marxian economic concepts constitute an indispensable starting point for any

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

theory which would adequately grasp the ecological conditions and limits of human social forms.<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding their generally critical stance with respect to Classical Political Economy, including Ricardo's version of it, Marx and Engels sustained and deepened *those aspects* of CPE which exemplified its hostility to the idea of natural limits to capital accumulation. In the one area where Ricardo explicitly asserts a natural limit he betrays a concession to Malthus's population theory. As we have seen, Marx and Engels were consistently and forcefully critical of this natural-limits argument. We must conclude that in their mature economic theory, Marx and Engels were even more resistant than Ricardo to the idea of economically significant *natural* limits to capital accumulation. This is, of course, a most important claim, and it requires further substantiation. I have space here to do this only in a very truncated and schematic form.

I shall consider, first, Marx's abstract concept of the 'labour process' as a trans-historical condition of human survival, and, second, his account of the forms taken by the labour-process under specifically capitalist economic relations. In both cases, I shall argue, Marx under-represents the significance of non-manipulable natural conditions of labour-processes and over-represents the role of human intentional transformative powers vis-à-vis nature. A consequence of this is that Marx is prevented from adequately theorizing both the necessary

---

<sup>37</sup> The following criticisms of Marx and Engels are, of course, by no means the first attempts to confront their work with an environmental perspective. On the issues I discuss below, Bahro's work remains suggestive but rather fragmentary (see B. Frankel *The Post-Industrial Utopians*, Oxford 1987), whilst I have incorporated certain of Gorz's arguments (for example on environmental problems and the falling rate of profit) into my own work. The cited works by Redclift, Walker and Enzensberger have been most useful. H. L. Parsons, *Marx and Engels on Ecology* (London 1977) and D. Pepper, *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism* (London 1984) both deal with ecological issues from a standpoint sympathetic to Marxism. The important and influential work of the 'analytical' Marxists—especially G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford 1978—is directly pertinent to my aims here. Although his exposition of Marx on the forces of production requires separate investigation, it is already clear that on Cohen's reading, Marx is rendered especially susceptible to the type of critique I propose (see esp. Chs. 1, 6 and 11 (9)). The two-volume *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today* (London 1977 and 1978) by A. Cutler, B. Hindess, P. Hirst and A. Hussain is developed from a very different perspective, but, especially in its discussion of Marx's value theory (Vol. 1, part 1) has some points of contact with my argument here. The authors do not, however, raise questions about the ecological presuppositions or problems of capitalist production. Anthony Giddens's *Contemporary Critiques of Historical Materialism* (Vol. 1, London 1981 esp. pp. 20–24 and Chs. 3 and 4), in seeking to discard Marx's evolutionism, simultaneously displaces the nature/society interaction from centre-stage. Somewhat paradoxically, the ecological emphasis of my critique of historical materialism provides added support for Giddens's insistence upon the time-space 'embeddedness' of societies: this is significant precisely because of the social importance of the causal powers and geographical distributions of the objects and materials which are among the indispensable contexts and resources for human social practices. Yet other recent discussions of historical materialism (such as A. T. Callinicos, *Is There a Future for Marxism?*, London 1982, G. Kitching, *Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis*, op. cit., and D. Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: the Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism*, Oxford 1987) whatever their considerable merits in other respects, give relatively little attention to the ecological dimensions of capitalist economic development.

dependence of all forms of economic life upon naturally given preconditions *and* the particularly striking and politically important form that this dependence takes with respect to specifically capitalist accumulation.

### The Labour-Process

First, then, Marx's concept of the labour-process. This is defined by Marx, as we have seen, as 'the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence'. At this level of abstraction, Marx excludes consideration of the historically variable social relations between persons in the process, whether these be relations materially required by it, or relations (such as those arising out of property ownership) socially imposed upon it. Thus defined, the 'elementary factors' of the labour-process are: '1. the personal activity of man, i.e. work itself; 2. the subject of that work; and 3. its instruments.'<sup>38</sup>

The process itself is an activity in which these elements are brought into appropriate relationships to one another and set in motion: 'In the labour-process . . . man's activity, with the help of the instruments of labour, effects an alteration, designed from the commencement, in the material worked upon. The process disappears in the product; the latter is a use-value, Nature's material adapted by a change of form to the wants of man.'<sup>39</sup> Marx here attempts to characterize human need-meeting activity upon nature as a process in which human activity employs instruments in order to bring about a change in some material object or substance. The change so wrought is intended to fit the object or substance to function as a means to satisfy some human need or want. Marx concedes that some very elementary transactions with nature do not require artificial implements, and here human limbs themselves can be regarded as playing the part of 'instruments of production'. The 'subject' of labour—the thing or material worked upon—may be 'spontaneously provided by nature', or, more commonly, it will have been 'filtered through past labour', in which case Marx speaks (somewhat misleadingly) of 'raw material'. Raw materials are then divided into two categories—those which form the 'principal substance' of the product, and those (such as fuels, dye-stuffs, etc.) which enter into the labour-process, but do not go to form the 'principal substance' of the product. Marx calls these 'accessory' raw materials. Henceforth, I shall speak of 'Raw Materials A' and 'Raw Materials B', respectively.

So far, as we have noted, Marx recognizes among the instruments of labour both human limbs themselves, and objects and materials 'which the labourer interposes between himself and the subject of his labour, and which serve as the conductor of his activity'.<sup>40</sup> But what of other elements and features of the environment within which the labour-process takes place? Marx recognizes that the earth itself (which 'furnishes a locus standi to the labourer and a field of

---

<sup>38</sup> *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 178.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

employment for his activity'<sup>41</sup>) as well as results of previous labour such as workshops, canals, roads and so forth may be conditions for labour-processes, without entering directly into them. Marx proposes to include these among the instruments of labour ('in a wider sense'). To recognize, as Marx himself does, that these 'instruments of labour' in the wider sense may be naturally given or the results of previous labour, I shall speak of 'natural' and 'produced' conditions of the labour-process respectively.

Central to Marx's abstract concept of the labour-process, therefore, is the notion of a *raw material A* undergoing a *transformation* to yield a *use value*. This transformation is the outcome of a *human labour* which involves the utilization of *raw materials B* and *instruments of labour* to achieve its purpose. The process involves both human intentional activity, and a range of distinct materials, substances and other non-human beings and conditions. There is, then, a primary, three-fold classification of the elements of the labour-process, in which the non-human elements are resolved into the two categories of 'subject' of labour (i.e. that which is worked upon) and instruments of labour (the conductors of intentional activity). There is also a secondary classification in which these major categories are further sub-divided (Raw Materials A & B, natural and produced Conditions, and so on). What is absolutely clear, however, is that both primary and secondary classifications allocate elements in the labour-process to conceptual categories on the basis not of their material characteristics but of their relationship to the purpose of the labour-process itself. One and the same item may, at different times, figure as product, instrument and raw material of different labour-processes. Which category it falls into on any particular occasion will be a function of what I shall call the *intentional structure* of the labour-process.

Now, it is immediately clear that the intentional structure of the labour-process is, for Marx, a transformative one. It is plausible to suppose that Marx's model is handicraft production of some kind. Carpentry, for example, could be readily represented as having just such an instrumental-transformative intentional structure. With some modifications, the representation might do for productive labour-processes in general, though with the important reservation that in industrial labour-processes the intentionality which assigns each element to its place in the structure is not that of the individual agents in the process. However, and this is the key point, Marx's conceptualization is supposed to represent not just *one broad type* of human need-meeting interaction with nature, but, rather, a universal, 'Nature-imposed condition of human existence'. Marx does, indeed, recognize such activities as felling timber, catching fish, extracting ore, and agriculture as labour-processes. But he constructs his general concept of the labour-process as if these diverse forms of human activity in relation to nature could be assimilated to it.

### Eco-regulation

Let us consider first agricultural labour-processes. My account, here,

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 180

assumes such labour-processes taking place on land already cleared and prepared, and using seed or stock animals which already embody past labours of breeding and selection. (To work without these assumptions is, in fact, less favourable to Marx.) My account, at this stage in the argument, also abstracts both from the property relations (or 'social relations of production') within which agricultural labour-processes might be formed and from the great range of specific agricultural technologies which have been and might yet be realized. I am, of course, very far from thinking that such considerations are unimportant. On the contrary, working at this level of abstraction will, I hope, help to illuminate the precise importance of such considerations (for example, in relation to the ecological consequences of 'green revolution' agricultural technologies and the modern capitalist 'industrialization' of agriculture).

In agricultural labour-processes, by contrast with productive, transformative ones, human labour is not deployed to bring about an intended transformation in a raw material. It is, rather, primarily deployed to sustain or regulate the environmental conditions under which seed or stock animals grow and develop. There is a transformative moment in these labour processes, but the transformations are brought about by naturally given organic mechanisms, not by the application of human labour.<sup>42</sup> Agriculture, and other 'eco-regulatory' labour-processes thus share an intentional structure which is quite different from that of productive, transformative labour-processes. This is so even where, as in modern capitalist agriculture, the forms of calculation employed by economic agents, and the economic dynamic of the process, more closely resemble the productive-transformative model. Indeed, the primary source of the ecological problems of modern capitalist agriculture lies precisely in the tension between these features and the constraints imposed by its intentional structure as what I call an 'eco-regulatory' practice. The extent of the difference between eco-regulatory and productive practices is the measure of the inadequacy of Marx's abstract concept of the labour-process, which, as we have seen, assimilates all labour-processes to a 'productive' model. For my purposes here the key distinctive features of eco-regulatory practices are as follows.

(1) Labour is applied primarily to optimizing the *conditions for* transformations, which are themselves organic processes, relatively impervious to intentional modification. The 'subject of labour' (in Marx's terminology) is therefore *not* the raw material which will become the 'principal substance' of the 'product' but, rather, the conditions within which it grows and develops.

(2) This labour on the conditions for organic growth and development is primarily (once agriculture is established) a labour of sustaining,

---

<sup>42</sup> Something already recognized by Adam Smith: 'The most important operations of agriculture seem intended not so much to increase. . . as to direct the fertility of nature towards the production of the plants most profitable to man. . . Planting and tillage frequently regulate more than they animate the active fertility of nature, and after all their labour, a great part of the work always remains to be done by her' Quoted in *Capital* Vol. II, London 1970, p. 365.

regulating and reproducing, rather than transforming (for example, maintaining the physical structure of the soil as a growing-medium, maintaining and regulating the supply of water, supplying nutrients in appropriate quantities and at appropriate times, reducing or eliminating competition and predations from other organic species, and so on).

(3) The spatial and temporal distributions of labouring activity are to a high degree shaped by the contextual conditions of the labour-process and by the rhythms of organic developmental processes.

(4) Nature-given conditions (water supply, climatic conditions, etc.) figure both as *conditions* of the labour-process, and as *subjects* of labour, yielding a category of 'elements' of the labour process not readily assimilable to Marx's tripartite classification (labour, instruments of labour, raw materials).

These four features draw attention to the extent of the *dependence* of eco-regulatory practices upon characteristics of their contextual conditions, which are the principal 'subjects' of their labour, and on the organic processes they aim to foster. For any specific technical organization of agriculture, these elements in the process are relatively impervious to intentional manipulation, and in some respects they are absolutely non-manipulable. For example, the incidence of radiant energy from the sun is absolutely non-manipulable. Labour-processes in agriculture are therefore confined to optimizing the efficiency of its 'capture' by photosynthesizing crop-plants, or complementing it with artificial energy-sources. In this case, non-manipulability is a consequence of the scale of the natural mechanisms involved, compared with the causal mechanisms which can be mobilized by human interventions. In other cases, such as climatic conditions, human interventions may, indeed, be cumulatively large enough in scale to have *effects* (e.g. the notorious 'greenhouse-effect'), but these effects do not and arguably cannot amount to intentional manipulation. The combination of epistemic obstacles and the problem of scale confine us to having effects on weather-systems which are predominantly unintended and largely unwanted.

In yet another class of cases—organic processes of growth and development themselves—it might be argued that recent and foreseeable developments in bio-technology are in train to eliminate what I have identified as key distinctive features of eco-regulatory practices. The widespread artificial use of hormones to intervene in organic developmental processes, and genetic engineering technologies both seem to point in this direction. My response, here, would be to suggest that the newer biological technologies have been 'sold' within a voluntaristic-Promethean discourse which has invariably occluded or rendered marginal the limits, constraints and unintended consequences of their deployment in agricultural systems. It is, for example, widely recognized among geneticists that a genetic modification which enhances the utility of an organism for agricultural purposes is generally accompanied by countervailing 'costs': higher yield as against lower resistance to disease, or greater vulnerability to environmental stresses, for



example. Organisms are not mere aggregate expressions of contingently connected and freely manipulable genetic particles.

Let us now turn briefly to the intentional structures of such primary labour-processes as hunting, gathering, mining and so on. These cases are more like production than eco-regulation in one respect: labour is applied directly to the object or material which is the intended repository of use-value. However, there are two major differences between these labour-processes and productive ones. First, the conversion of the 'subject of labour' into a use-value cannot be adequately described as 'Nature's material adapted by a *change of form* to the wants of man'. This conversion is rather a matter of selecting, extracting and relocating elements of the natural environment so as to put them at the disposal of other practices (of production or consumption). These primary labour-processes, then, *appropriate* but do not transform. Secondly, they, like eco-regulatory processes, are highly dependent on both naturally given contextual conditions and the properties of the subjects of labour. In these practices, the place of principal and accessory raw materials is taken by 'naturally given' materials or beings, whose location and availability are relatively or absolutely impervious to intentional manipulation.

Eco-regulation and primary appropriation, then, have intentional structures which cannot adequately be characterized in the terms of Marx's abstract conceptualization of the labour-process. This is because of Marx's implicit 'Procrustean' over-generalization of the intentional structure appropriate to productive, transformative labour-processes. Labour-processes whose intentional structure emphasizes the dependence of labour on non-manipulable conditions and subjects, in which labour adapts to its conditions, sustains, regulates or appropriates its subjects, as distinct from transforming them, are given *no independent conceptual specification*. The significance of their place in the overall 'metabolism' between human populations and their natural conditions becomes literally unthinkable.

### Capitalist Production

Of course, Marx's abstract concept of the labour-process as a trans-historical condition of human existence is not central to his concerns in *Capital*. It could very plausibly be argued that I have made too much of problems with this one concept. Marx and Engels themselves tended to work with a view of the historical development of the 'forces of production' in which the non-transformative labour-processes I have just discussed are seen less as 'moments' in the total economic life of any particular society, than as forms of interaction with nature which characterized whole previous epochs of human history. Simple appropriation or collection is characteristic of human societies at the lowest level of development of their productive powers, agriculture marking the historical acquisition of powers to wrest from nature means of subsistence which it would not otherwise have provided. This, in turn, is a condition for a further division of labour and the eventual emergence of modern industrial production.

Marx and Engels, like most of their contemporary economic and social theorists, were profoundly impressed by the transformative power of modern industrial production. It was understandable that they should focus upon it and the social relations implicated in it as the central historical dynamic of their time. However, what Marx and Engels never adequately theorized (without, on the other hand, ever quite forgetting) was the extent to which this massive and dynamic sector of 19th-century European economic life remained tied to eco-regulatory and primary-appropriative labours as the necessary sources of energy, raw materials and food, and so, also, to a range of non-manipulable contextual conditions.

To show how and why this was so, it will be necessary to consider the way in which Marx conceptualized specifically *capitalist* production. Central to his analysis is the distinction between capitalist production considered as a process of producing use-values and as a process of producing exchange-values. In its former aspect, capitalist production is a labour-process in which a specific kind of useful labour is set to work 'concretely' to transform a raw material into a specific useful product. In its latter aspect, capitalist production is a process of exploitation of 'abstract' labour which aims at a quantitative increase in exchange value. The second intentional structure is considered to be abstract in the sense that the material properties of the product, the character of the labour which shapes it, and the nature of the want it satisfies are all quite irrelevant to the central purpose of a purely quantitative increment in the value of the product. The social-structural conditions governing economic action under capitalism require that this second, value-maximizing intentional structure must be superimposed upon, and predominate over, the intentional structure of production in its aspect as a utility-producing labour-process. This asymmetrical relation between the two structures is the source of the liability of capitalist economic relations to generate severe dislocations between what is produced and what is needed, and a whole range of irrationalities in the global allocation of labour and material resources in relation to human needs.<sup>43</sup> Although a capitalist economy must in the long run balance production and consumption across the various sectors of production and meet minimal subsistence needs of its labouring population, Marx's analysis is an attempt to show why this must be an unstable, disruptive and crisis-ridden process, rather than a matter of harmonious regulation by a beneficent 'invisible hand'.

Probably because Marx was convinced that the overall dynamics of capital accumulation and the contradictions of this process were rooted in the abstract, value-creating aspect of capitalist production, it was this aspect which constituted the overwhelming topic of analysis in *Capital*. Marx showed relatively much less interest in labour-processes as 'concrete' combinations of specific kinds of labour with specific instruments. Certainly he did give an important place to the

---

<sup>43</sup> As will become clear later, the claim here is solely that these irrationalities can be explained in terms of the contradictory intentional structure of specifically capitalist production. It is *not* claimed that irrationalities of these kinds are peculiar to capitalism.

distinctively capitalist tendency to replace living labour with machinery, and to transform the technical basis of the labour-process. But his crucial interest was in the consequences of these tendencies for capital accumulation considered in value terms, and for the development of the antagonism between capital and labour. This focus has been continued by Marx's successors in the 'labour-process debate', in ways which have shifted attention away from labour-processes—including those involved in capitalist production—as social forms of interchange with nature.<sup>44</sup>

### The Concrete Intentional Structure

If we turn, now, to consider capitalist production from the standpoint of its *subordinate*, yet necessarily present intentional structure as concrete labour-process, it is possible to show that Marx's account is defective *even with respect to productive/transformativ*e labour-processes. There are five main features of productive labour-processes which tend to be either under-theorized by Marx, or simply left out of account. These are:

- (1) The material nature of both instruments of labour and raw materials will set limits to their utilization/transformativity in line with human intentions. Recognition of these limits is a condition of effective practice.
- (2) Although the immediate source of raw materials and instruments of labour may be earlier labour-processes, indirectly all must have their source in appropriation from nature (in some form of 'collection'). Persistence of specific production processes is therefore dependent not only upon ancillary production processes, but also upon appropriation from nature.
- (3) Labour itself is an indispensable element in the labour-process. Marx treats the activity of labouring as the 'consumption' of the labourer's capacity for work, or 'labour-power'. This, in turn, is treated as the product of the prior labour of producing the labourer's

---

<sup>44</sup> The seminal work for the contemporary debate on the labour process is, of course, Harry Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, New York 1974. The shift of emphasis to which I refer is evident from page 1, where Braverman begins: 'All forms of life sustain themselves on their natural environment, thus all conduct activities for the purpose of appropriating natural products to their own use', but quickly goes on to say 'However, what is important about human work is not its similarities with that of other animals, but the crucial differences that mark it as the *polar opposite*' (emphasis added). A valuable collection of essays on issues arising from Braverman's 'deskilling' thesis is S. Wood, ed., *The Degradation of Work?*, London 1982. See also P. Thompson, *The Nature of Work: An Introduction to Debates on the Labour Process*, London 1983 and D. Knights, H. Willmott and D. Collinson, eds., *Job Redesign*, Aldershot 1985. In an interesting commentary on an alleged dead-end to the labour process debate ('A Labour Process to Nowhere?', *New Left Review* 165, September/October 1987, pp. 34–5), Sheila Cohen has argued for a reintegration of studies of capitalist labour processes with an understanding of their aspect as social-relational processes of valorization and exploitation. Whilst this comment has some purchase on the recent directions of the debate, it does not call into question the still more pervasive occlusion of the aspect of labour-processes as forms of appropriation of nature.

means of subsistence. Marx's tendency, which he shared with other political economists, to assimilate the processes of production and reproduction of the labourer to those of producing their means of consumption has been subject to widespread feminist criticism. Inconclusive as it has been, the 'domestic labour' debate has at least demonstrated that distinctive labour-processes, conducted *outside* the sphere of capitalist economic relations as they are characterized in *Capital*, are presupposed in the appearance and reappearance of workers with labour-power for sale in capitalist labour-markets. Presupposed by the productive labour-processes of capitalism are ('domestic') labour-processes which have a quite different intentional structure.<sup>45</sup> In their dependence on organic processes of reproduction and development they resemble eco-regulatory practices, but in their affective and normative content they are quite unlike all other labour-processes. Marx's implicit assimilation of these processes to productive processes complements his anti-Malthusian and more general reluctance to recognize 'natural limits'.

(4) Although the dependence of productive practices upon contextual conditions is less apt to figure in the calculations of agents, these practices, no less than primary appropriation, eco-regulation and human reproduction, *are* dependent upon such conditions. Marx recognizes that these conditions include some which are naturally given and others, such as factories and roads, which are products of past labour. But in recognizing the necessity of these conditions, Marx simultaneously fails to recognize their significance by including them *within* the category of 'instruments of production'. These conditions cannot plausibly be considered 'conductors' of the activity of the labourer. By definition, they do not *enter into* the labour-process at all. Moreover, the subjection to human *intentionality* which is implicit in the concept of an 'instrument' is precisely what *cannot* be plausibly attributed to these contextual conditions of production. This is particularly true of naturally given geological, geographical and climatic conditions. Even in the case of productive/transformational labour-processes, then, the conceptual assimilation of contextual *conditions* of the labour-process to the category 'instruments of production' has the effect of occluding the essential dependence of all labour-processes upon at least some non-manipulable contextual conditions. Marx, like Ricardo before him, was able to get away with his occlusion to the extent that such contextual conditions of production could be taken as unproblematically 'given', either being insusceptible to or simply not requiring intentional manipulation under conditions then prevailing.

(5) Finally, Marx's intentional, or 'functional' classification identifies the elements in the labour-process in terms of those properties (causal powers, liabilities and tendencies) in virtue of which they are acted upon or utilized by human agents in order to achieve their purposes. In any actual labour-process these properties of its elements will be

---

<sup>45</sup> The literature of the 'domestic labour debate' is very extensive. An excellent overview is to be found in M. Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, Verso, London 1980, Ch. 5, esp. pp. 173-180. See also my own comments in *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, London 1984, pp. 135-9.

only a *limited sub-set* of the properties really possessed. The remaining properties constitute an indefinitely large 'residual' category which, from the standpoint of the calculations of the agents involved in the labour-process, may be known or unknown, relevant or irrelevant to the achievement of the immediate purposes of the labour-process. Insofar as this class of properties does not enter into the calculations of agents, their practices are liable to have unforeseen and/or unintended consequences which may exceed, counteract or otherwise modify the intended outcome of that or other labour-processes. Insofar as this class of properties did not figure in Marx's characterization of the labour-process, he shared the blindness of agents themselves to the sources of *naturally* mediated unintended and unforeseen consequences of specific practices of activity upon nature. This point will be developed in what follows.

These five general considerations all point in the same direction. In each case, Marx's conception even of productive labour-processes is shown to exaggerate their potentially transformative character, whilst under-theorizing or occluding the various respects in which they are subject to naturally given and/or relatively non-manipulable conditions and limits. From the standpoint of an ecological critique, three important corrections thus need to be made to Marx's conceptualization. First, contextual conditions should be conceived separately from the instruments of labour, as an independent class of 'initial conditions'. Second, the continuing pertinence of these contextual conditions to the *sustainability* of production needs to be incorporated, as with eco-regulatory practices. This is significant in that it renders thinkable the possibility that these conditions might cease to be spontaneously satisfied, and so require the ancillary labour-process of restoring or maintaining the environmental conditions for productive sustainability. André Gorz has provided an interesting theorization of this possibility in the shape of a postulated environmental foundation for a tendential fall in the rate of profit.<sup>46</sup> Third, some of the *naturally* mediated unintended consequences of the operation of labour-processes may impinge upon the persistence or reproduction of its contextual conditions and/or raw materials. Where raw materials are absolutely limited in supply, or can be replenished only at a definite maximum rate (e.g. because of their dependence upon organic developmental processes), the labour-processes may undermine their conditions of sustainability in ways suggested under point 2 above.

Where, on the other hand, causal mechanisms are set in motion by the labour-process which are *extrinsic to the achievement of its purposes*, future sustainability may be undermined by another route. Energy and materials entering into the productive process but not embodied in the product, for example, are conceptualized by Marx as 'accessory' raw materials. His account of the intentional structure of production ignores the 'further adventures' of these materials or their residues once they have played their part in the achievement of the intrinsic purpose of the labour-process. This abstraction on Marx's part is justified to the extent that these 'further adventures' bear no relation

---

<sup>46</sup> A. Gorz, *Ecology as Politics*, pp. 20-8.

to the sustainability of the labour-process in question. However, once the dependence of productive labour-processes on contextual conditions is explicitly recognized, then the possibility that they may be undermined by their own naturally mediated unintended consequences is open to investigation. Among these unintended consequences may be the effects of accessory raw materials and their residues as well as unutilized energy releases upon water supplies, atmospheric conditions, climatic variables, and so on.

So far, I have tried to demonstrate that in a number of respects Marx's account of capitalist production employs a limited and defective concept of productive labour-processes. Each of these limits and defects contributes to an overall exaggeration of the potential transformative power of such labour-processes, at the expense of any full recognition of their continued dependence upon and limitation by other non-productive labour-processes,<sup>47</sup> by relatively or absolutely non-manipulable contextual conditions, and by naturally mediated unintended consequences. I have not, so far, considered the implications for my argument of the *dual* intentional structure of capitalist production: of its status as a process of self-expansion of value. I will reserve this consideration for a later stage in the argument.

## 5. Sources of the 'Productivist' Ideology

### Nature, Capitalism and Emancipation

Next, I shall try to show that these weaknesses in Marx's account of the labour-process are not merely contingent 'errors', particular failings of insight. On the contrary, they are coherent with significant strands in the wider theoretical perspectives of Marx and Engels, and they have a certain plausibility given the historical location of their thinking. First, as we have seen, Marx and Engels were disposed, especially through their critiques of Malthus, to reject as necessarily conservative 'natural-limits' arguments. Whilst they were firmly committed to the view that capital accumulation *was* subject to outer limits, these limits were theorized as *internally* generated by the contradictory social-relational structures of capitalist economies, and mediated through class struggles.

Secondly, notwithstanding their systematic moral critique of capitalism, and their analysis of its transitory nature, Marx and Engels also held an 'optimistic' view of its historical role as preparing the conditions for future human emancipation.<sup>48</sup> In its *progressive* historical role, capitalism accelerates the development of the forces of production to the point where transition to a realm of freedom and abundance becomes a real historical possibility: 'Development of the productive forces of social labour is the historical task and justification of capital. This is the way it unconsciously creates the requirements of a higher

---

<sup>47</sup> Here, as elsewhere, I am using the productive/non-productive distinction to discriminate between the different *intentional structures* of labour processes, not in the more technical senses in which it is commonly used in Marxist economic debate

<sup>48</sup> See G.A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7.

mode of production.<sup>49</sup> Modern industrial production, fostered by capitalist economic relations, is a precondition for the future communist society. The 'historical task' of capitalism is precisely to transcend the conditional and limited character of earlier forms of interaction with nature. Emphasis upon the transformative powers of human social labour, as embodied in industrial capitalist labour-processes, is, then, an intrinsic element in Marx's overall view of the historical process. Moreover, as the above quotation also suggests, this is something which bears not only upon the 'historical task' of capitalism, but on the very conceptualization of the post-capitalist future itself.

Marx and Engels were famously reticent about the character of this communist future. But the brief remarks they did allow themselves always gave central place to the emancipatory potential of a communal appropriation of nature which presupposes the inheritance of highly developed productive forces from capitalist pre-history. Engels's remarks in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* are a striking example:

The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of Nature, because he has now become master of his own social organization. The laws of his own social action, hitherto standing face to face with man as laws of Nature foreign to, and dominating him, will then be used with full understanding, and so mastered by him.<sup>50</sup>

The view of emancipation implicit in this passage and others like it is roughly this: in earlier stages of history, humans have suffered a doubly conditioned lack of autonomy. Insofar as their transformative powers vis-à-vis nature have been limited in their development, they have been at the mercy of, dominated by, the forces of external nature. But superimposed upon this source of domination has been another, rooted in society itself, experienced as a 'second nature'. With the historical development of human social powers vis-à-vis nature there arises the possibility that the tables can be turned with respect to both sources of oppression: humans can acquire communal control over their own social life, and through that, over nature itself.

But if the acquisition of human autonomy presupposes control over nature, this suggests an underlying antagonism between human purposes and nature: either we control nature, or it controls us! No room, apparently, for symbiosis, peaceful co-existence, mutual indifference or other imaginable metaphors for this relationship. At first encounter, it might seem that this view of an underlying antagonism in our relation to nature does, after all, embody a notion of naturally imposed limits. But this is a misleading impression. For Engels, in this passage at least, progress in our productive powers is achieved to the extent that we incorporate what was previously encountered as an external limit within the sphere of conscious human control. Sometimes,

---

<sup>49</sup> *Capital* Vol. III, London 1962, p. 254.

<sup>50</sup> F. Engels, 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific', in C.S. Feuer, ed., op. cit., pp. 149-50.

as in this passage, Marx and Engels speak as if this process could be extrapolated without limit. The metaphor in the early *Manuscripts* of a 'humanization of nature' seems to suggest a potentially residue-less subjection of the natural world to human intentionality. Elsewhere there is a recognition that ~~some~~ element of 'struggle' with nature for the necessities of life is inevitable, the content of emancipation being given in the reduction to a minimum of the time taken up in this struggle. Either way, the possibility of human emancipation is premissed upon the potential for the transformative, productive powers of associated human beings to transcend apparent natural limits, and to widen the field of play for human intentionality. The coherence between this notion of emancipation, the terms in which Marx and Engels criticize Malthus, and the defects in Marx's concept of the labour-process should now be apparent.

### Spontaneous Ideologies of Industrial Capitalism

I shall shortly return to this question, but first I want to consider a further way of making intelligible Marx's and Engels's systematic exaggeration of the potential transformative power of human action in relation to nature. This approach to the problem makes use of the idea, often employed by Marx and Engels themselves, that certain structures of interaction present to actors who participate in them forms of appearance which are systematically misleading. Actors affected by such forms of appearance will tend to hold mistaken or distorted beliefs about their own activities. Such patterns of mistaken or distorted belief we may call 'spontaneous ideologies'. Insofar as participants in productive labour-processes, especially industrial ones, are not required to attend to the maintenance or restoration of contextual conditions, are not *in fact* confronted with absolute shortages of raw materials, and can ignore the extrinsic, unintended consequences of their practices, then to this extent they are liable to exaggerate their potential transformative powers. Marx could in this way be understood as a victim of a widespread spontaneous ideology of 19th-century industrialism.

But this is by no means the whole story. Here we must return to a consideration of the overriding intentional structure of capitalist production—the intentionality of self-expanding value. As we have seen, Marx and Engels saw the development of the forces of production under capitalism as itself only a secondary—though still necessary—by-product of this primary intentional structure. Now, the very feature which defines this principal dynamic of capitalist accumulation is indifference to the qualitative character of the labour-process. Production on an ever-growing scale is a requirement for the survival of individual capitals, and of the system as a whole. But what is produced, how it is produced and with what resources are entirely secondary to the purpose of quantitative maximization of exchange-values. The labour theory of value, which Marx adopted, albeit with important modifications, from his predecessors in Classical Political Economy, is the central conceptual device through which the limits, contradictions and crises of capital accumulation are rendered thoroughly social-relational. As we saw in the discussion of Ricardo, the



labour theory of value either excludes natural scarcity from consideration, or allows it to be recognized only in the form of its displaced manifestation within the internal, social-relational structure of the economy.

It is tempting to see Marx's focus on capitalist production as a process of maximization of exchange-value by means of the exploitation of labour, his focus on the social relations of production at the expense of the labour-process as yet one more element in his flight from any recognition of 'natural limits'. On this reading, the spontaneous ideology of 19th-century industrialism is overdetermined by a spontaneous ideology of capitalism as a (naturally) limitless process of self-expansion of value. The blindness to natural limits already present in the industrial ideology is compounded and intensified by the overriding intentional structure, with its indifference to the concrete character of raw materials, labour or product.

## 6. Towards a Green Historical Materialism

But now we have reached the point in the argument where we can begin to see the potential explanatory *fruitfulness* of Marx's critical account of capitalist accumulation, once defects in his concept of the labour-process are corrected. Only if this part of the argument works can the effort of a critical encounter be shown to pay off!

### Relativizing the Nature/Society Connection

The first step in this more positive task of theoretical reconstruction is to call into question the terms of Marx's and Engels's responses to Malthus. More broadly, it is necessary to recognize that 'natural limits' epistemic conservatisms can be countered effectively without wholesale retreat into social-constructionism. In effect, this is the error Marx and Engels make. For them, 'relative surplus population', or 'the reserve army of labour', is a *consequence* of the dynamic tendency of capital accumulation. The form taken by the argument in Marx's *Capital* makes the surplus population an effect of the tendency of constant capital to rise as a proportion of total capital. But, in fact, this only follows on the basis of implicit assumptions about the rate at which the working population reproduces biologically. Marx does not acknowledge these assumptions.

However, at least one element in Marx's and Engels's argumentative strategy against Malthus can be endorsed. This is their commitment to relativizing Malthus's law to specific historical epochs (or forms of society). As I have shown, in effect Marx and Engels take historical/social relativization to imply some form of social constructionism. This is not, I believe, required. What is required is the recognition that each form of social/economic life has its own specific mode and dynamic of interrelation with its own specific contextual conditions, resource materials, energy sources and naturally mediated unintended consequences (forms of 'waste', 'pollution', etc.). The ecological problems of any form of social and economic life would have to be theorized as the outcome of this specific structure of natural/social articulation.

This approach avoids both the Scylla of epistemic conservatism and the Charybdis of 'social-constructionist' utopianism. Each form of social and economic life is understood in terms of its own specific contextual conditions and limits. These conditions and limits have real causal importance in enabling a range of social practices and human purposes which could otherwise not occur, and also in setting boundaries and limits to their sustainability. At the same time, giving full theoretical recognition to contextual (including natural) conditions and limits in this way opens up alternative ways of conceptualizing the relationship between emancipatory strategies and natural limits.

First, and most important, we can look again at the crucial assumption underlying the technological optimism which Marx and Engels shared with many other theorists of development (ideas which are still very influential). This is the assumption of an intrinsic antagonism between the fulfilment of human purposes, on the one hand, and the forces of nature on the other. Although there were, as we shall see, moments when Marx and Engels criticized this idea, it remains as a presupposition of their view of the relationship between the historical development of the forces of production and the ultimate achievement of human emancipation. Natural conditions and limits tend to be regarded as a primary source of human heteronomy, the progressive function of the development of the forces of production consisting in their *transcendence* of limits by incorporating natural conditions within the sphere of human intentionality: a domination or control of nature.

By contrast, the re-conceptualizations of labour-processes which I am advocating permit an explicit recognition of the ways in which naturally given processes, mechanisms and conditions *make possible* human need-meeting practices which otherwise could not occur. But in any realist or materialist approach, enabling conditions must be understood as simply the obverse side of the coin from limits or constraints. A power conferred on human agents by a specific social relation to a natural condition or mechanism, will also be bounded in its scope by that self-same relation. If, for example, a naturally given water-supply, in the form of a river, is utilized by a human population both for agricultural irrigation and fishing, it figures as an enabling condition for both practices. Insofar as human needs are met and purposes fulfilled by both practices, the combination of the socially established technology with the naturally given condition can be seen as emancipatory. However, once this pattern of interaction with nature is established its continuation is subject to definite limiting conditions. High levels of fertilizer run-off, or irregularities in the outflow of water from irrigation dykes, for example, will have their effects on fish-populations in the river. Only a re-conceptualization of labour-processes along the lines I am suggesting can render analysable such complex patterns of enablement and constraint that are built into all forms of human interaction with nature. It follows from considerations such as this that 'natural limits' arguments are not in conflict with emancipatory projects as such. Provided 'natural limits' are conceptualized in ways which recognize their historical, geographical and social relativity, they are incompatible only with *utopian* would-be emancipatory strategies.

Secondly, since natural limits are themselves theorized, in this approach, as a function of the articulated combination of specific social practices and specific complexes of natural conditions, resources and mechanisms, what constitutes a genuine natural limit for one such form of nature/society articulation may *not* constitute a limit for another.<sup>21</sup> In other words, a fundamental reorganization of the form and dynamics of the interrelation of a society with external nature may have the effect of transcending what were, given the previous mode of appropriating nature, real natural limits. Clearly, if we think in terms, for example, of non-renewable resources as a natural limit, a society which shifts its resource-base, or builds resource-recycling into the intentional structure of its labour-processes, may effectively transcend what previously were encountered as limits. Again, to recognize that specific social and economic forms of life encounter real natural limits is to concede nothing to natural-limits conservatism. On the contrary, it may provide the beginnings of a powerful argument for *transforming* the prevailing pattern of nature/society interaction.<sup>22</sup> Of course, the new form will also be a specific combination of enabling conditions and constraints (with respect to whatever human social purposes prevail within it). Different technical bases for society can be understood in this way as delimiting specific alternative patterns of possibility for further human development. Theorizing such alternative possibility-spaces can help in thinking about 'development' not as a unilinear process of quantitative expansion of the forces of production, but, rather, in terms of a range of qualitatively different ways of realizing human social possibilities.

Finally, there is a third respect in which the approach I am advocating illuminates the relation between emancipatory strategies and natural limits. By giving explicit theoretical recognition to relatively or absolutely non-manipulable conditions and elements in labour-processes, one throws into relief a distinction between technologies which enable a *transcendence* of naturally imposed limits and technologies which enhance *adaptability* in the face of natural conditions impervious to intentional action. Adaptive, as distinct from transformative technologies are at work in some of the most fundamental and distinctive features of human ecology: the building of shelters, clothing, the use of artificial means of transport and so on can be seen as socio-cultural extensions of biological features such as warm-bloodedness which facilitate both survival and well-being in the face of a spectacular range of environmental conditions. A strategic focus on adaptability-enhancing

<sup>21</sup> This proposal corresponds closely to W. H. Matthews's important contribution 'The Concept of Outer Limits', in W. H. Matthews, ed., *Outer Limits and Human Needs*, Uppsala 1976. 'The limits are not, in all cases—not even in most cases—explicit, predictable, discrete thresholds which if exceeded produce catastrophic results, regardless of how they are approached. The mental image should not be one of the edge of a cliff where a single additional step plunges one to the depths below. The concept is much more complex and requires full consideration of the role man plays in setting the limits, since these are determined in two ways: (a) by the quantity of existing resources and the laws of nature; but also, (b) by the way man conducts his activities with respect to his natural situation' (pp. 16–17).

<sup>22</sup> An argument which, as we have seen, Engels was himself able to use against Mal'thus

technologies may be no less emancipatory, and is certainly likely to be far more sustainable than the transformative focus which predominates in our civilization.

### Rethinking Labour-Processes and Ecological Politics

Two proposals for positive work of theoretical reconstruction emerge from these admittedly extremely abstract and entirely provisional considerations. The first would be an extension of what I have tried to do above by way of providing a provisional typology of labour-processes and representing their intentional structures. This would give special attention to the character of labour-processes as modes of social appropriation of nature, so displacing the centrality of the focus on social-relational aspects in the labour-process debate as currently conducted. To do this is not in any way to argue for a 'demotion' of social-relational issues; the point is rather to suggest that the patterning and dynamics of power relations and social conflicts in the labour-process, and in the wider society, will be viewed very differently on the basis of a re-conceptualization of the labour-process itself.

Two examples of this spring to mind immediately. One is that the structure of possibilities open to workers in resisting new technologies is highly dependent upon material properties and causal powers of technologies, many of which are *extrinsic* to the intentional structure of the labour-process (i.e. properties and powers other than those in virtue of which the technology is employed). A second example concerns the wider environmental unintended consequences of labour-processes. Some of these have highly differentiated impacts on the quality of life for different categories of social actors. The political significance of this in terms of the patterning of conflict along lines of cleavage related to gender, residential location, occupational situation, life-style and so on needs to be understood, and integrated with the more traditional focus on lines of class cleavage arising 'at the point of production'. For example, 'green revolution' technologies in agriculture, depending on the political, social and economic conditions of their introduction, are liable to produce direct consequences for distributional inequality and rural class structure. Owing to the relatively high levels of capital outlay required, economies of scale and differential access to credit, larger farming units typically benefit more, and more quickly, than smaller ones. The tendency towards capitalist relations in agriculture is accelerated, peasant farmers are dispossessed and converted into landless rural or urban labourers, and so on. These processes are well recognized and much discussed. But they exist alongside and articulate with the socio-economic effects of *naturally mediated* unintended consequences of the new agricultural technologies. Again, there will be much variation from locality to locality, but, typically, the greater intensity of farming and associated simplification of local ecosystems will put increasing pressure on traditional practices which rely on various types of primary appropriation from natural and semi-natural habitats (the collection of firewood, fishing, hunting, gathering of fruits and seeds, and so on). Pesticide and nutrient seepage into water-supplies and fisheries, too, may contribute to these processes, and impose other costs on the

quality of life of agricultural and non-agricultural populations alike. Again, pesticide residues and chemical additives associated with forms of food-processing and storage which are themselves adjuncts of green-revolution farming techniques have implications for the diet and health of consumers of agricultural goods well beyond the boundaries of those social groups affected by the immediate socio-economic consequences of agricultural reorganization. It remains to be seen what forms of oppositional alliance could be established among such disparate groupings and what goals they might formulate, but the necessary analysis cannot even begin until the category of 'naturally mediated unintended consequences' is fully integrated into social and economic theory.

A second possible avenue for further theoretical work would be to reconceptualize the Marxian typology of modes of production, as articulated combinations of forces and relations of production. This would entail, *in each case*, not only specifying the social-relational aspects of each mode and the intentional structure of the labour-process (in Marx's terms, the characteristic forces and relations of each mode), but also *complementing* this with a non-intentional characterization of the contextual sustaining conditions and liability to generate naturally-mediated unintended consequences.<sup>33</sup> Each mode would, in other words, be thought of as instantiating a specific form of nature/society interaction, and as having its own distinctive ecological 'niche'. Each mode must be conceptualized in terms of its own peculiar limits and boundaries, and its own associated liabilities to generate environmental crises and environmentally related patterns of social conflict.

Such a project would help to do away with two highly pervasive misconceptions of our contemporary environmental crisis. First, as this line of analysis shows, the contemporary crisis cannot be understood as the direct, unmediated consequence of either 'population' or 'industrialization'. Environmental impacts are a function of complex combinations of social practices and their contextual conditions, not of persons and their appetites. Secondly, we are confronted with at least two broad categories of social-structural embodiment of industrial societies: 'Western Capitalist' and 'State Socialist', together with several variant forms which do not fit easily into either category. It is clear that *each* of these historical forms has its environmental contradictions, and equally clear that their patterns, dynamics and emergent lines of social and political cleavage are very different. It should also be noted that there is widespread evidence of often catastrophic environmental contradictions affecting both pre-industrial and

---

<sup>33</sup> This proposal, though conceptualized differently, is very much in line with Timpanaro's comments on the abandonment by contemporary Marxists of the materialist thesis of the dependence of man on nature. "The position of the contemporary Marxist seems at times like that of a person living on the first floor of a house, who turns to the tenant of the second floor and says: "You think you're independent, that you support yourself by yourself? You're wrong! Your apartment stands only because it is supported on mine, and if mine collapses, yours will too", and on the other hand to the ground-floor tenant: "What are you saying? That you support and condition me? What a wretched illusion! The ground floor exists only in so far as it is the ground floor to the first floor . . ." ' *On Materialism*, op. cit., p. 44.

non-industrial economic formations. As the foregoing points imply, it is a mistake to suppose that capitalism is the root of *all* ecological evil. I think it can be shown that capitalism is a mode peculiarly liable to ecological crisis, but it must not be forgotten that other modes, too, have their own distinctive ecological crisis-tendencies.

### Building on Marx and Engels

Finally, I shall return, briefly, to exegesis of Marx and Engels on these questions. A 'productivist' 'Promethean' view of history is widely attributed to them. I have, for the purposes of the above argument, tended to accept this reading, and have delved into some of the conceptual 'substructure' which underpins it. But, whilst I remain committed to the above ecological critique of their work, it is also necessary to recognize the basis for another, quite different reading, in which their explicit or tacit acknowledgement of some of these ecological arguments may be emphasized. Engels, for example, in his critique of social Darwinism adopts a much wider concept of 'production' than the 'transformationist' one I have criticized.<sup>54</sup> Here, he contrasts collection with production, conceiving of the latter as any practice by which human beings prepare means of life which nature itself would not have provided. This does not necessarily involve the 'raw materials/instrument/transformation' pattern of production in the narrow sense, and is consistent with adaptive and regulative models of natural/social interactions as well as with domination/control/transformation models.

Both Engels and Marx do also have ways of characterizing the future society which deliberately avoid the 'triumphalism' and utopianism of the 'productivist' account. One very striking example is also provided by Engels:

Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastering of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.<sup>55</sup>

The following well-known passage from *Capital* Vol. III is easily read as confirming the Promethean view of a historical struggle to subdue and control the forces of nature:

With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by a blind power . . .<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> See T. Benton, in Mephram and Ruben, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> From the 'Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man', in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, London 1968, pp. 361–2. It should not be forgotten that one of Engels's earliest works is, in effect, a denunciation of the environmental consequences of capitalist industrialization, 'The Condition of the Working-Class in England', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, London 1973.

<sup>56</sup> *Capital* Vol. III, p. 820.

But if we read this passage as postulating not the bringing of nature under common control, but rather, '*interchange* with nature', then it is quite consistent with the idea of a form of interaction with nature which integrates ecological self-regulation within its intentional structure. There is, indeed, other textual evidence to support such a reading. An important example, to which I shall return, is Marx's discussion of the deleterious effects of capitalist agriculture on soil-fertility: 'By this action it destroys at the same time the health of the town labourer and the intellectual life of the rural labourer. But while upsetting the naturally grown conditions for the maintenance of that circulation of matter, it *imperiously calls for its restoration as a system, as a regulating law of social production*, and under a form appropriate to the full development of the human race.'<sup>57</sup>

These passages suggest that both Marx and Engels did recognize the transhistorical necessity of human dependence upon naturally given conditions and limits to their social activity. Crucially, the latter quotation from Marx quite explicitly advocates ecological sustainability as a 'regulating law' which would govern socialist agriculture, by contrast with its capitalist form. This complements and continues a central theme of Marx's early writings: a critique of regimes of private property in terms of the estrangement they presuppose and reimpose between humans and the natural world. An external, instrumental relation between humans and the natural conditions, contexts and subjects of their life-activity displaces an orientation to nature in which such activity is a source of intrinsic aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual fulfilment. Communism will restore to the human species these lost dimensions of their relationship to their non-human environment.

### An Ecological Crisis-tendency of Capitalism?

I now turn to some brief indications of how Marx's account of specifically capitalist production might be revised in such a way as to provide a powerful explanation of the peculiar liability of this economic form to generate crises of an ecological kind. The argument as developed so far is sufficient for us to see in very general terms why this might be. The dominant labour-processes of industrial capitalism, which have transformative intentional structures, are, as we have seen, liable to sustain spontaneous ideologies in their economic agents which exclude or occlude their dependence upon contextual conditions and limits. The conceptualizations of the political economists, including Marx, tend simply to reflect the forms of calculation of the economic agents themselves in this respect. Moreover, the value-maximizing intentional structure which is superimposed upon and predominates over the productive intentional structure *intensifies* the latter's insensitivity to material conditions, resources and limits by its very indifference to the concrete character of the process. Insofar as the expansive dynamic of capital accumulation also requires the production of use-values on an ever-expanding scale, it follows that the intrinsic dynamic of capitalist production is a tendency to exceed its

---

<sup>57</sup> *Capital* Vol. I, pp. 305-6, emphasis added

extrinsic conditions of sustainability, and, moreover, to do this in ways which are excluded or occluded *by the forms of calculation available to economic agents*. Even if these forms of calculation were to *become* available, through a shift in the ideology of capitalist economic agents, the constraints implicit in their economic situation would preclude any significant shift to an 'eco-regulatory' orientation in practice.

This is, of course, a highly schematic and abstract specification of a distinctively capitalist ecological crisis-generating mechanism. To render it more specific and concrete would require us to follow Marx himself in considering the conditions for the reproduction not of individual illustrative examples of capitalist production, but of the total social capital. This is Marx's concern in Vol. II of *Capital*, and what he has to say there is potentially very illuminating. As Marx notes, once we consider individual capitalist processes of production in the context of the circulation of the total social capital, conditions previously *assumed* as 'given' now must be recognized as problems requiring theorization:

... in both the first and the second Parts it was always only a question of some individual capital, of the movement of some individualized part of capital.

However the circuits of the individual capitals intertwine, presuppose and necessitate one another, and form, precisely in this interlacing, the movement of the total social capital.<sup>38</sup>

Marx's theorization of these relations of mutual presupposition and necessitation of individual capitals involves him in a direct recognition of the pertinence of broad categories of *use-values* in the products and materials employed by these individual capitals. Marx's distinction between Departments I and II (production of means of production and of articles of consumption, respectively) does precisely this. The continuity and scale of capitalist production in one 'Department' is dependent upon that in the other, and vice-versa. The output of Department II, for example, must be equivalent to the total value of the variable capital (labour power) employed in Departments I and II combined (neglecting, for simplicity's sake, capitalists' consumption). In this way, Marx is able to specify the proportionate allocations of capital and labour to the different branches of production which would be required for a crisis-free reproduction of the conditions of production, firstly at a constant rate, and then on an expanded scale.

However, although Marx's account does embody a recognition that these reproduction requirements include both 'the value as well as the substance of the individual component parts' of productive capital,

---

<sup>38</sup> *Capital* Vol. II, p. 357. Of course, I have only scratched the surface of what Marx has to say on the conditions of reproduction of the total social capital. My guess, here, is that a fresh look at the debate arising from Rosa Luxemburg's famous use of Marx's reproduction schemes to develop an hypothesis of necessary external limits to capitalist accumulation would yield some interesting insights for an ecological critic. See R. Luxemburg and N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*, ed., K. TARBuck, London 1972.



his representation of these conditions is conducted primarily in value-terms. Marx focuses upon the analysis of the conditions under which 'the individual capitalist can first convert the component parts of his capital into money by the sale of his commodities, and then reconvert them into productive capital by renewed purchase of the elements of production in the commodity-market'.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, the *immediate* conditions of this possibility include sufficient means of exchange (money) and appropriately proportionate prior allocations of capital and labour across the different branches of production which supply these particular elements of production. Equally clearly, among the *mediate* conditions of this possibility are the quantitative proportions of the use-value outputs of those labour-processes which appropriate energy, raw materials and means of subsistence from nature. Marx does not deny this. Indeed, he comments approvingly on Quesnay's statement of it: 'The economic process of reproduction, whatever may be its specific social character, always becomes intertwined in this sphere (agriculture) with a natural process of reproduction. The obvious conditions of the latter throw light on those of the former, and keep off a confusion of thought which is called forth by the mirage of circulation.'<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding Marx's explicit recognition that the whole immense intertwined process of circulation of the total social capital remains bound to its naturally given conditions, and to the labour-processes of primary acquisition, he does not pursue the further implications this thought might have. Among these implications, especially if combined with the rectifications I have proposed in Marx's concept of the labour-process itself, are a number of insights into the ecological crisis-generating tendencies of capitalist accumulation. First, it becomes possible to perceive in crises of disproportion the mediated and displaced manifestations of crises of an ecological nature whose source is located in those labour-processes such as extraction and eco-regulation which are at the 'interface' between the total social capital and its natural preconditions. Second, it becomes possible to recognize those branches of 'production' (energy generation, the extractive industries, agriculture and forestry) through which the primary appropriation of nature is conducted as economic *loci* which focus and concentrate the generalized tendency of capitalist production to exceed its natural limits. They are, so to speak, 'pressure points' towards which the ever-growing material requirements of all other social practices are conducted and through which they must flow. Thirdly, it is, as we have seen, precisely in these practices that the intentional structures and forms of calculation of value-maximization and transformative action are most severely inappropriate to the sustainability of the practices concerned. Perhaps this is why it was almost exclusively with respect to agriculture that Marx was able to recognize, if only descriptively, the tendency of capitalism to destroy its own natural conditions of possibility: 'Capitalist production... disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil, i.e. prevents the return to the soil of its elements consumed by man in the

<sup>59</sup> *Capital*, Vol. II, p. 397.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363

form of food and clothing, it therefore violates the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil. . . . Moreover, all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil, all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility.'<sup>61</sup>

The hope, finally, is that by beginning to identify and characterize the mechanisms of ecological crisis-generation we can ultimately move beyond the methodological weakness of much contemporary ecological analysis which operates by groundlessly extrapolating the mere empirical trends.

### Some Concluding Reservations

The above analyses are, of course, very partial and abstract. They focus upon labour-processes in general, and capitalist production in particular. No attempt has been made to identify and describe ecological crisis-generation in, for example, state-socialist societies. Nor have I given extended treatment of the ecological implications of the forms and dynamics of material consumption, important as these are for any political strategy which incorporates an ecological perspective.<sup>62</sup> Nor indeed, have I considered the powers of economic intervention of capitalist states, in their role as global regulators of the conditions of capitalist production and reproduction. If capitalist economies have intrinsic ecological crisis-generating mechanisms, it remains to be seen whether these crises, along with the more widely recognized forms of economic crisis, can be effectively managed by way of legislation and state interventions. It can also plausibly be argued that some of the great ecological dangers now confronting us are neither direct nor mediated effects of economic relations and dynamics, but arise from relatively autonomous strategic and military policies of nation-states and alliances. Finally, my analysis contributes towards, but by no means fully confronts, the most distinctive and dangerous feature of our contemporary ecological crisis: its *global* character. The question is not solely one of identifying the ecological crisis-tendencies of specific modes of social and economic life. It is the further, and almost unimaginably complex one of interpreting the combined and overdetermined interactions of these diverse mechanisms at the level of the ecosphere itself. More, even, than this, 'the point is to change it'.

<sup>61</sup> *Capital*, Vol. I, op cit, pp 505-6

<sup>62</sup> A critical discussion of C.P.E.'s assumption of 'limitless desires' as subjective conditions for capital accumulation (exemplified in the passage from Ricardo quoted above, p 52) would be a useful starting point, here. It would have to tackle the question of how to conceptualize human needs, and the limits to the commodification of the means of satisfying them. Important recent work which takes us in the direction of such a theory of needs includes W. Leiss, *The Limits of Satisfaction*, London 1978; K. Soper, *On Human Needs*, Brighton 1981; and L. Doyal and I. Gough, 'A Theory of Human Needs', *Critical Social Policy* No. 10, Summer 1984. See also my own suggestions for a naturalistic, but non-reductionist theory of needs in T. Benton, 'Humanism vs. Speciesism? Marx on Humans and Animals', *Radical Philosophy* 50, Autumn 1988, esp. pp 13-15

*interview*

Martin Chalmers

Robert Lumley

## Enzensberger's Europe

*Martin Chalmers:* We would like to begin with *Europe, Europe*.<sup>\*</sup> Although there are any number of paths which lead out of this work, we were interested first of all in how the book came about.

*Hans Magnus Enzensberger:* I have a friend in Sweden who is chief editor of the biggest daily there, and since I have an old Scandinavian connection—I lived in Norway for many years—he asked me whether I'd like to write about the elections in Sweden. That was in 1981. So the project started by accident. I'm not a professional journalist and never have been. I discovered that I wasn't really very interested in the Swedish elections; instead I wrote this rather lengthy piece on Sweden, which the paper carried in instalments. Masquerading as a journalist turned out to be an interesting experience. If you go up to people and claim to represent the media, they will immediately take the situation for granted and accept whatever questions you ask. I was surprised to find out that people didn't really mind the intrusion, the questions.

I very quickly developed two basic attitudes or stances, which turned out to be rather liberating. For one thing, I adopted a position of great ignorance, just as if I were a visitor to Tibet. The less you know, the more people have to tell you. That was one aspect. The other was the change of perspective resulting from having to take the point of view of the people you talk to. Experimentally, you put yourself in their shoes. It's what anthropologists call 'participant observation'. That's why I left out the powerful people. I never asked for an interview with a prime minister. I also decided early on in the project to leave out the big countries. They represent the perspective of power, the perspective of centrality. Instead, I deliberately chose a number of peripheral perspectives.

*Robert Lumley:* Every project is a combination of calculation and chance. You started with an invitation out of the blue. How did one piece of writing become a project?

HME The element of chance is wonderful because each person you meet will put you onto someone else. It's like a daisy chain. You have to give yourself a lot of leeway. If you stick to that method, you land up in places you'd never have seen otherwise. But then, after the field-work is done, you start to think about it. And that's when your conceptual baggage catches up with you. The ignorance you've affected has to be informed by a lot of background knowledge. That means, first of all, delving into the history of the place you are investigating. This dialectic of ignorance and knowledge is part of the fun. In the end it turned out, of course, that my subject wasn't just Sweden. So I decided to go on.

MC Part of that intellectual baggage, in a positive sense, was presumably the ideas in the essays brought together in *Political Crumbs*.<sup>1</sup>

HME Yes, that was a first step without which I would not have been ready to undertake the project. Thirty years of opinionated writing condition you. It was quite a painful process to let go

MC Both in terms of themes and the way you wrote the essays.

HME I got fed up with the traditional essay as it had existed in Germany. That means having a thesis, and everything you write consists of evidence to support your thesis, thereby triumphantly proving what you wanted to say from the start. In the long run, this proves to be quite boring. Writing should be a way of discovering something, not of proving what you already know. So the gist of what you say and the form in which you write cannot be separated. If you choose a linear argument and form of writing, then you are liable to eliminate the things that don't fit, and your writing becomes poorer because the linearity ties you down. Whereas in this game called 'journalism', you are free to have dialogue, narrative, quotation,

---

\* *Europe, Europe* was published by Radius, London 1989. This interview was conducted in London on 18 September 1989.

<sup>1</sup> To be published by Verso in autumn 1990

paradox, and even an element of fiction. You are not limited to discourse-oriented writing.

MC As the book developed did you think there were any costs in excluding the core countries of Britain, France and West Germany?

HME I think there's an element of compensation involved because the powerful countries occupy a large space in people's minds. There is at least the illusion of having a lot of prior knowledge. For instance, the Germans have always been preoccupied by France, and you couldn't just write forty pages on France because, before you got started, you would have to undertake the *démontage* of pre-existing ideas. I also feel very strongly that the smaller countries are underrepresented in our imaginary, as is their potential contribution to the future. Just because you have a higher Gross National Product it doesn't follow that you have more to offer our civilization. Where did Ibsen or Strindberg come from? They came from tiny places. We are all provincials. Where does creative energy come from? It doesn't necessarily come from the seat of power.

This notion may have something to do with the fact that I'm German. The central perspective has always been very strong in Germany. Our society used to be hierarchical, and given Germany's geopolitical position, from the time of Bismarck onwards that meshed with the logic of power, of bigness and centrality and led right up to the Nazis. It was tempting to reverse this perspective. In my case, there were also biographical reasons in that I've always had the habit of visiting and living in places which were 'outside', 'peripheral'. There was Norway, and then I spent a lot of time in Italy, not to mention Cuba and other places.

MC: It's interesting that the starting point for the book was not an address to a German audience, in the first instance, but to a Swedish one. Subsequent essays were also published in the countries you wrote about.

HME It happened by chance, but after the first piece I decided to continue in exactly the same way. It is easy enough to tell a British audience about the Basques, or to tell a French audience about the Lithuanians. But to tell the Lithuanians about the Lithuanians, you have to be very careful because they are going to be your harshest critics. If you work in a superficial way, you'll be found out. I decided that it would be very useful to put myself to the test. It was also a way of getting feedback. The Hungarian piece was published in a Hungarian *samizdat* publication, and I got a lot of reaction. There were objections to some things, and I was able to make a number of corrections. I had to shift some of the emphasis in my treatment of anti-semitism in Hungary, for example. I also had to clarify some of the contradictions within the Hungarian opposition, and so on.

RL Can you give us an example of how, say, the Swedish piece was received? Obviously one of your themes is national stereotypes and how we can't really do without them. To what extent did that mean anticipating responses and building them into the text?

HME Publishing in the country of the people you are talking about lends the process a greater degree of passion because there is simply no possibility of neutrality. If people read about themselves they do not react in the way that they do if they are reading about a third party. Actually, most people like to hear about how others see them, so that creates a richness which is much less evident in neutral reporting. Sometimes you can even create havoc. As it happens, the Swedes were the people who were perhaps caught most unawares, and my modest piece came as an enormous shock. There were public debates which went on for months. That was not due to me alone. The 'Swedish model' was beginning to break up, the Swedes were beginning to doubt their national aims and ideals. It took only a small input to precipitate a whole wave of self-doubt. Many people hated the piece, but if they had been less complacent, less smug before, perhaps I would have been less critical. I'd always been well translated in Sweden, so people had some idea of who was making the criticisms. They were prepared for attacks from the Right, but not from someone like me who had a reputation as a radical.

I was also extremely interested in the Spanish experience. I'd been to Spain regularly and followed its development from the 1950s. Its incredible transition from dictatorship to parliamentary democracy is a paradigm; it has been very closely studied by the East Europeans, who, perhaps mistakenly, in some respects, have tried to adopt it as a model for their own transition.

MC In *Spanish Shards* the comparisons with Germany which underlie much of the book are made explicit.

HME I can hardly escape that. The Swedish piece, for example, deals indirectly with German social democracy. I don't want to talk about my biography, but the mere fact of being born in 1929 is practically determining, politically speaking. As someone who was seventeen at the end of the war, I used to be rather obsessive about German questions. For the first ten or fifteen years in which I was writing, I was more or less obsessed by them. *Europe, Europe* can be seen as an attempt to break away from things German. After all, it's not an adequate definition of a writer that he is German. At some stage you have to rebel against this definition because it ties you down and closes the mind.

MC In the epilogue, the 'German problem' is turned round and given a positive aspect. The Scottish journalist in Berlin refers to the historical normality of Germany as being a patchwork, this being one possible exemplar for a future Europe.

HME Being a report set in the future, it is bound to be a bit tongue-in-cheek. That is why I chose as narrator a fictive reporter who is not a European but an American. Therefore he has a right to a measure of *naïveté*.

RL I was very interested in what you said about method, your sudden pleasure and delight in playing the journalist role. It struck me that

perhaps at an earlier stage in your writing, when you were heavily influenced by Marxism, you had a notion of surface appearance and hidden reality. Here, however, there are a lot of metaphors such as 'facade' and 'illusion', but instead of adopting an obvious approach: 'This is how things appear, but this is how it really is', you say at one point that the surface is true, and, at another, that it lies. You are continually cutting across expectations with a kind of transversal take. Was this a conscious strategy?

HME It is one of the things that literature is equipped to do. I used some of my experience from writing poetry, where this kind of epistemological problem comes up. It even becomes a theme in my poems. My book on Europe can also be seen as an attempt to overcome the division between the artist or the poet, and the intellectual who is working with concepts. Given the circumstances in Germany in the postwar period, strong opinions were vital; you had to intervene in an immediately political sense. It was a job that had to be taken on. But I also suffered as a result because my work was cut in two.

In the Marxist tradition there are some authors who are very concerned with these problems. Benjamin, for example. His way of deciphering things, his whole almost phenomenological approach, his transcendence of mere politics. Of course, his Marxism was always rather heretical. But even in Marx's work itself there are some wonderful passages, for example where he analyses commodity forms.

MC: The section on the Lenin Ring in Budapest can be read as a *homage* to Benjamin.

HME Yes, the passage is an allusion to him.

MC I remember an English journalist a couple of years ago, expressing his unease at the unself-conscious way in which the opposition in Eastern Europe, in Budapest, for example, talked about being 'European'. In London, he remarked, such innocence would be impossible because of the importance of black politics for the Left. Perhaps one cost of avoiding metropolitan centres like London and Paris is that the problems of Eurocentrism, of Europe in the world, are less visible.

HME There was a time when I was very involved with Third World issues. I spent a lot of time in Latin America. Not speaking Chinese I couldn't hope to understand much about what was going on there, but for people like me Latin America provided a point of contact. But I won't mince words. I feel defeated. The more I tried to be involved politically with Third World problems, the more I felt frustrated.

I think this very subjective statement can be rephrased in more general terms. Eurocentrism is a many-headed beast, and it seems to me that the European Left in the sixties indulged in its own form of Eurocentrism. Waiting for the Third World to come up with solutions to our problems, for example; or, vice versa, the notion that we with our concepts could be of any help to people there. I myself decided

at one point to go to Cuba for a year with the rather naive notion that I could do something useful there. I had noticed that the Cuban diplomatic service was simply very ignorant. They didn't know the first thing about the countries they were sent to. So I suggested having a workshop and explaining the fundamentals (political systems, economies) of places in Europe I could tell them about. Of course it didn't work out. Aside from the anecdote, it is unclear what you can do if you go, for instance, to Peru. The more I go there, the more I try to understand, the less I feel equipped to be of any use.

Take the attitudes of the European Left to the Cultural Revolution in China, to Cuba, or to Cambodia: they all led to *débâcles* of one kind or another. They were examples of incompetence to say the least and sometimes very dubious behaviour from a moral point of view. Is it mere defeatism then, if many people in our part of the world have decided that they are better equipped to deal with the problems at home? In Germany, for example, the Third World is right on our doorstep: millions of Turks, hundreds of thousands seeking asylum from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and so on. This immigration, which is bound to increase in the future, calls into question some of our basic assumptions. Even given the best possible scenarios there is bound to be considerable turmoil. I don't for a moment believe in an easy transition to the 'multicultural society' of the future. That's a liberal fool's paradise in which everybody enjoys exotic food and acquires a nice mulatto tint. The real contradictions do not appear in this facile utopia. The extreme Right will not be slow to exploit them.

RL Within *Europe, Europe* the problem was alluded to in 'Portuguese Reveries' and in the section on gypsies in the Hungary chapter. However, the question of immigration doesn't occupy a prominent place.

HME That is a criticism that can be made of the book. The phenomenon is so huge and so important that more space should have been devoted to it.

MC You talked earlier of the absence in our imaginary of the apparently peripheral countries of Europe. In the case of Britain and Germany, there is a sense in which they each have a presence in the other's imaginary yet there is astonishingly little real intercourse between them.

HME There is a lot of ignorance. Perhaps the way to deal with that sort of question would be to do a dual study. It would be interesting to do a book on Germany and Britain, to play them off against each other. It wouldn't have been possible to cope with it in my project. I'm a bit frightened by the size of such an operation. The past history of the relationship is long and complex. It is also deeply rooted. Hitler's fantasies about the British, for example, are fascinating. He couldn't bring himself to believe that the British people he admired so much would turn against him.

On the other side, there's the instinctive British attitude, embodied in the word 'Teutonic'. By definition, 'anything Teutonic is something



we don't want.' But then even the German-French relationship is not settled. The French are haunted by German spectres, and the Germans, much more than they admit, are also very hedgy about the French. That's another phenomenon that struck me on the *Europe, Europe* project, the longevity of such modes of perception. You can modify and downgrade them, but such things never disappear entirely. There are metamorphoses, they take different shapes—the French are not worried about our army, but they are worried about the Mark.

MC. However, if we take this derogatory term 'Teuton' or 'Teutonic'—even though it has persisted, seems indeed indispensable to the English view of Europe, it nevertheless took hold very suddenly. One can pretty well date it not just to the First World War, but to the first months of the war. It took hold with great suddenness.

HME For the Romantic poets and Carlyle, Germany had a presence. But in the later part of the nineteenth century, I think that Britain was too concerned with its own empire to be really interested. Of course, there was not the 'Teutonic' antibody there. Just a lack of interest.

MC They were more bothered about the Russian bear.

HME: You had an empire on your hands, which is a very time-consuming pastime. It takes a lot of energy.

MC Looking at the relationship from the other side, then, after the war Britain was regarded as something of a model of tolerance, of parliamentary democracy—of a welfare state. How is Britain—its England—perceived now?

HME: I think Germans still basically retain a rather woodcut-like admiration for the British, and, as I said, the Nazis, perversely enough, shared it. The Germans are taken with a Britain which probably doesn't exist. A Britain of monarchy, old England. God knows what it may consist of now. On the other hand, Britain was seen as a declining nation in political and economic terms. I remember asking myself, 'How can a people lose an empire, their own self-image, their position in the world, in such a relatively peaceful way?' I'm not forgetting that there were unpleasant episodes, such as the wars in Malaya and Kenya. But nevertheless, I did ask myself, 'How can the British take it so calmly?' It was, if you like, my own form of admiration of the British. And then the reaction, which somehow I had always been expecting, came in the form of Thatcherism, a refusal to accept this relative decline. The Falklands War was symptomatic. I suppose that something nasty is bound to happen if you're *déclassé* as a nation.

MC. It appears to be the case that while in much of Europe, especially the East, political life is becoming more open, less secretive, in Britain the state is extending the bounds of secrecy.

HME Foreigners are completely baffled by the whole British obsession with espionage. There is something neurotic about it. Everybody

knows that nowadays there is next to nothing to be kept secret. Perhaps the fantasy word 'MI5' is there to compensate for a loss of real power. In the typical British spy novel it's always the British who are clever. The Americans have the power, the hardware, and the money, but it's the British who are clever.

RL: I'd like to shift the argument to the role of intellectuals. At one point you quote Juan Cueto Alas as saying that the intellectual was traditionally faced with three options—servile self-advancement, poverty in the provinces, and prison—to which are added today's temptations. These include overproduction, the star system, quick money and fashionableness. In other words, the world of the media. How do you find yourself as an intellectual coping with these choices and dangers?

HME: I was socialized in rather different times and that is a great advantage. I really don't envy anybody who is getting started as a freelance intellectual today. I feel relatively, I say only relatively, safe from some forms of media delusion, simply because of my formation by the post-war period. I've always felt that being a writer and making a living as a writer is extremely precarious. I used to wonder, 'Why on earth are they feeding me?' Strangely enough they didn't send me to prison, they even paid me for my work! That was the attitude with which I started, and at the back of my mind I always had schemes for earning my living in other ways if the need arose. I was also haunted by the spectre of the German emigration of the thirties. So my outlook on being an intellectual is a bit different from that of somebody born during the boom, the West German boom. Nowadays, the only people in Europe, in my opinion, who retain both the ethics and the role in society which European intellectuals historically have been used to, are the ones in Eastern Europe. And that's why the most interesting and the most important intellectual and literary production today comes from that part of the world. Polish poetry today is first rate, with authors like Szyborska and Zagajewski. There is Brodsky, there is Kundera, there is Kolakowski, people in exile, but for each of them there are others whom we hear far less about, because they work in Prague, Krakow or even Bucharest. These people are important. They have a very strong influence on the course of events—they are almost decision-makers. Look at Kuron or at Michnik. These are people like ourselves, but they are in a different historical position.

In a minor way '68 was a moment in my country when suddenly there was a constellation in which the intellectual counted. It was a moment when you could see which way people jumped. You were obliged to make a choice, whereas now . . . I mean pluralism is very nice, it's very nice not to have police armed to the teeth in the street. I like pluralism, but culturally and intellectually it is a very unsatisfactory condition. Because one thing is just as good as another, standards are very hard to maintain. It's up to you to maintain them, but if you don't then probably nobody will notice. As far as West German culture is concerned, it is more or less the realm of mediocrity nowadays.

RL: Are you saying that conflict is the precondition for a lively culture?

HME: Absolutely. Mind you, the decisive moment may come by surprise. It's a matter of situation. (Sartre titled a series of essays *Situations*—intellectuals can grasp a historical situation, react to it, explain it, use it—but they cannot of course, create it.) In the meantime all we can do is retain a minimum of memory. In times of stasis that is perhaps the intellectual's main task—keeping open the gene-pool of the culture, keeping intellectual options open. Some stances may look anachronistic, but you can never predict what the next turn of the road may bring. And then it may come in very useful if there are some people around who remember things, who have not jettisoned completely everything they learnt.

MC: One of the most interesting questions you raise is how historical and national stereotypes about oneself, how a country and a culture's own stereotypes about itself, are maintained or change. Sometimes they're condensed in monuments and places like the Valley of the Fallen near Madrid. But you present other kinds of historical memory as well. For example, there's an interesting gallery of writers and poets you choose to quote in the course of your travels. There's Döblin, Pessoa, Neruda, Gyula Illyés and you end with 'Bohemia Lies by the Sea', a poem by Ingeborg Bachmann. That's part of maintaining historical memory as well.

HME: Literature used to have this function as a collective memory. It's an open question as to what extent it still performs this service. I'm quite sure there are some types of literature which are more concerned with liquidating our memory. The contemporary is not everything; to be up to date may be a form of idiocy.

RL: It was interesting that you said you didn't consider yourself a journalist and yet you used journalistic tools and possibilities. Most journalism is instantly redundant, but you are obviously trying to build in a sort of seasoning process so that your work outlives the moment of its writing.

HME: It's also an implicit criticism of literature as it is still understood, because in our culture, at least in Germany, we have this strong distinction between *beaux arts*, 'imaginative literature', *Belletristik*, as it is called in German, which is the novel and the poem and so on, and instrumental writing, applied literature. I think that is nonsense. What is the novel after all? All these genre distinctions make me very impatient. Some of the most important writing of the last decade has been in areas which are not easily defined in terms of literary genres. Kapuściński and Bruce Chatwin are just two examples of writers who have never respected these boundaries. In my own German literary tradition there is Heine, a prime example of someone who was in a certain sense a journalist, but you can still read his reports today, because they are also literature. So why keep this distinction? It's really a publisher's idea. It's the publisher who wants a novel which is a novel, which is a novel—a very tautological ambition.

MC. The conversation at the beginning of 'Portuguese Reveries' with the monsignor, expresses one of the central themes of the book. If I can quote (it's the monsignor speaking): 'I have often asked myself what a topography of time would look like. What does the date on the calendar mean after all? There is a great deal of non-synchronicity in our world. Why always just isotherms and isobars? It would be much more interesting to find lines that would tell us which time zones we are passing through when we travel... lines that show the crevices and faults in history... One could call them isochromes.' Apart from echoing Ernst Bloch, this represents another and important aspect of the question of synchronicity and non-synchronicity which you've talked about. And that idea of moving back and forward through time as well as space recurs again and again. For example, in Warsaw you find yourself transported back to Europe immediately after the Second World War.

HME Yes, I'm very interested in anachronism. I think that we are a patchwork of different times. Our minds are full of things which do not correspond to one another in the time-scale: both deposits and projections. Bloch's theme, of course, was the thing which is not yet here, which you anticipate; but in our imagination it works the other way round as well... Also, I like the paradox of doing journalistic work which is topical and at the same time sabotaging this notion of actuality.

RL And also the concept of 'facts'. It was interesting that one of your American reviewers actually took you to task for being too literal in your transcriptions.

HME Which is very naive! There is a strong element of fiction in the whole thing. If I quote people who are not named then sometimes what appears in the book is a merging of things said by different people. However, I don't invent. All the things said by Poles, were said by Poles. But I do create up to a point and I also create my own character.

RL You don't have levels, and you get away from the notion that something is important and authoritative because it is said by X or Y, or that a statement of fact carries more weight than something fictional. These distinctions are undermined.

HME They have the same status. This is partly derived from my experience with what used to be called documentary literature, which was a sort of literary fashion, at least on the continent, in the late sixties. I was very involved with this type of writing, only I didn't believe in its theoretical precepts. You can never escape the problem of creation, of fictionality, simply by putting a microphone on the table. That idea is naive. The result is not more 'authentic' than a novel. People invent, they forget, they embellish, they tell lies. The eyewitness account is just another fiction. This is something I thematized in a book I once did on the Spanish Civil War—which has never been translated into English—on the Anarchist leader Durruti.<sup>2</sup> The book

---

<sup>2</sup> *Der kurze Sommer der Anarchie*, Frankfurt/Main 1972.

is, from a formal point of view, pure montage, with the addition of some commentaries I wrote myself. I was fascinated by Durruti and his life and ideology, but the book was really an attempt to deal with the problem of fictionality and the document. To my mind the whole issue is also related to the problem of originality. I have never believed that the author is at the origin of creation. He's just working with material given by others, whether it's other writers or just something he hears on the tube. I don't believe in *creatio ex nihilo*. Language itself is not your own, you didn't invent it.

Finally, as far as the Durruti book is concerned, I was also glad that I did the interview with the old Anarchists, who are now all dead. 1971-72 was really the last opportunity to do it, the last moment when the survivors were still around.

RL: It's very much part of the idea of giving people a voice, letting people appear in their words.

HME: And your text gets richer, of course, so perhaps there's something left over from documentary literature after all. But I don't want to make any grand claim. In the sixties it was said that everybody is a writer, and I think that's overstating the case. Everybody has speech, everybody's a storyteller, but that doesn't mean that everybody is a great artist. That's a kitsch theory.

MC: If we can now return to the situation of intellectuals in West Germany, Habermas has tried to adopt the traditional role of critical engagement.

HME: Habermas, and also, in his way, Grass. Grass speaks out publicly, he is a speech-maker. Habermas is not a speech-maker, Habermas is a philosopher, and in Germany a philosopher still retains a remnant of authority.

MC: What I mean, partly, is that he adopts the role and the discourse which you have become suspicious of.

HME: Yes. He does so very deliberately and very consciously: The Project of Modernity has to be completed, the idea of Enlightenment has to be defended. This is all very respectable, and given our circumstances it's very useful and very necessary. However, I have the feeling that he's perhaps insufficiently curious. He's not much tempted by the unpredictable. Perhaps that's too much to ask of a philosopher. He's caught up in the Hegelian spirit. He likes to think that there are laws of history. He won't claim to know them, not in such a crude way, but it's implicit in his conception of the modern project, which he wants to see continue more or less as it is. He also has interesting things to say about communication. He grasps everything, philosophy, language theory, sociology, political history; he knows everything, but I don't like the way he holds on to things. The trouble with holding on so tightly is that you may well miss something more important. You may end up like the famous statue of Laocoon: frozen in your fight with ancient enemies, in a sort of intimate captivity—while behind your back new monsters, new options appear. To me,

the work of Habermas is just too well-defined. But then, consistency is a philosopher's strength. It's also a hazard. Take his idea of a universal discourse, free of power relations. As a social model, I think it has no sound anthropological basis. It is very much a university utopia: the whole of society is seen as a sort of ideal seminar.

RL The idea that a lot of intellectuals within the institutional framework of universities and schools are, in a sense, prisoners of those particular apparatuses seems to worry you a good deal. For example, in your essay 'A Modest Proposal for the Protection of Young People from Poetry',<sup>3</sup> which includes an encounter with the butcher's wife whose daughter has got low marks when studying one of your poems at school, you take teachers to task for becoming drill-masters. Instead of using poems as a way of opening things up, you see criticism being used as a form of discipline. You have little patience with a certain type of intellectual who inhabits the academy.

HME I have a more general problem with institutions. I admit that I can't conceive of a civilization without institutions, but the degree to which we are conditioned by them is rather astonishing. No matter what the institution is, *déformation professionnelle* is very strong. It is a product of conditions which are no longer as compelling as they used to be. Given the degree of mobility that exists today, nobody can actually dictate 'normal' behaviour as was done in the 19th century, when you were born into your class and more or less stayed there; if you were a parson, you were a parson with everything that went along with it. But nowadays most of us are no longer trapped for life. There is a lot of self-repression involved if you become an organization man. Perhaps in a big company they still ask you to wear a suit and not to get divorced. But elsewhere? In Germany even a school teacher can behave pretty much as he likes. And that's why I take the teachers to task, not because of their sociological fate, but for failing to use the space, the options, the degree of freedom they really have. That's very sad. Of course, universities too are very dangerous places for a thinking person.

MC: You appear to have come to that conclusion very early. Presumably you could have gone into academic life?

HME: I never considered it. It's perhaps a matter of temperament. I just couldn't stand more than nine months of any office or job. I just couldn't. I went into institutions in order to find out about them, and what made them tick. I did it deliberately. I went into publishing, into radio, into television, because if you don't know their tricks they can and do tell you that it's all a big mystery. The truth is that you can learn most of these things in four weeks. You can become a bank manager, if that's your ambition, in four weeks. There's nothing mysterious about it. Most of the guilds and territories which the professionals carve out for themselves are twaddle. There are exceptions, a surgeon really has to know something, but don't tell me it's the same for a bank manager. That's nonsense! If you were given three months'

---

<sup>3</sup> Published in the collection, *Mittelmass und Wahn*, Frankfurt/Main 1988.

apprenticeship you could run the overseas service of the BBC. It's part of the power game to exclude, and to create these entitlements.

MC The project with the publisher Greno is not like these earlier explorations of the workings of the media. What is the aim of the series you do with him?

HME Well, in a way it's quite bizarre. First of all, I think it's a complete anachronism. I like the way books used to be made. The skill which goes into printing, the art of printing, was acquired over four or five centuries. And now it's going down the drain and being ruthlessly displaced by a newer technology which may turn out to be equally wonderful but which hasn't yet had the time to mature. I wonder whether with the stress of downpricing and all the other economic pressures it will ever acquire the degree of sophistication which printing has developed historically. That was something that I complained about in public, shouting at the publishers for producing these throw-away objects which they call books. Then one day a certain Mr Greno came up to me and said, 'I have a workshop, the only workshop in Germany capable of producing books in the way you want them to be produced, but I don't exactly know what to print, so would you care to publish one volume a month in a series which you can call whatever you like and which you can define yourself?' So, for five years we have been publishing one book a month in this series called *The Other Library*. Its logic will only become evident in the long run. At first sight it looks like a collection of Enzensberger's favourites—and if the books I want don't exist then I try to find someone who will write them for me. I am my own test person. If I find something interesting, then I think there must be a few thousand other people around who will also find it interesting—and up to now it has worked to an astonishing degree. The first volume was a Greek classic, Lucian, a Greek satirist. It sold 19,000 copies, and the trade was utterly amazed by that success. But I do new books, I do old books, I don't care whether they're new or old, it doesn't matter whether they're foreign or German, or whether they're novels or not. They have to have a long half-life, they shouldn't be very perishable—but my partner in this project is an adventurer, and so now we're facing an economic crisis.

RI Because you've done too well?

HME He branched out and did all sorts of other things. He started a paperback series and did enormous coffee-table books, and now he's facing bankruptcy. So I have the unfortunate task of behaving like a manager. I have to deal with take-overs and talk to bookkeepers, because I want to take the series to some other publisher. It's so boring dealing with banks and so much money.

MC Was the launching and success of Christoph Ransmayr's novel, *The Last World*, an interesting experience?

HME We were taken unawares. Nobody expected it, because again it's actually rather a difficult book and so nobody understands why it sold 150,000 copies. These are the mysteries of the trade. Success is

neither here nor there. The best thing is to forget about it. But producing the series is lovely because it's an adventure, and because of the way we work. I don't go to the office, I work at home. I do it by telephone, by fax, and I have people coming round. I don't need to have an office. Our operation is minimal. There's another fellow in Frankfurt who does the editing, and the printing is done in a small town in Bavaria. You don't need a receptionist, a board room or anything like that. It's better to dismantle all these things.

RL Do you use a computer?

HME: No, personally I don't use a computer, because I write so little and I find it useful to work in the old way. I copy my own text. I write it, I revise it, and then I copy it, and in copying it, everything changes. One can increase one's speed with the computer but speed isn't my problem. You see, if you insist on making hand-made cars then there's no real need for a conveyor belt. I can do without technological overkill.

RL From reading *Europe, Europe* one gets a feeling that the role of the state is changing, in some European countries at least.

HME: I think it is diminishing. Though I wouldn't say that about England, it's true of Germany. In Germany, in the past, and not just during the Nazi period, if somebody came into a room and said he was a minister of something or other, or a general, or a director of some company or a councillor of state, then everybody would freeze. He would be considered very important indeed. Nowadays he's just another person, and the man who owns a couple of supermarkets wouldn't consider himself inferior. Hopefully, it is a sign of government degenerating into administration.

RL You seem to have an ambiguous attitude to that process. In the Swedish essay you lament the fact that the Swedes are so bureaucratic about their constitution, the fact that they lack a symbolic dimension to their national life. At the same time, you like the ordinariness, the way that people look the same whether they are ministers or not. Is this a paradox?

HME: Politically, there is much to be said for the mediocre sort of government which is embodied in my mind by the city of Bonn. It is the very paradigm of a government lacking in aura. But the more you can actually afford to ignore the state structures, the more I think civil society needs other ways of expressing its collective memory and the identity of a place. Such symbols need not belong to the state. In Bavaria, for example, the prime minister's palace is much less important than the beer garden. If you were to take away the beer garden and its ceremonies, that would be a very serious blow. This sounds like a joke, but it's not. Just imagine London without its pubs and parks! We need places and things to recognize ourselves in.

The concept of civil society which has become so vital to the East European debate will continue to grow in importance. But I also see



signs of similar developments in our own very mediocre society in West Germany. I am struck by the extent to which people claim rights. You cannot, for example, build a factory which is likely to involve ecological risks without meeting opposition. There is no way of getting round having to deal with the citizens who live there. They may not be the most enlightened people in national matters or international concerns, but this development contains the nucleus of a self-governing society, or at least some elements of it.

In Bavaria there was the attempt to build a nuclear reprocessing plant at Wackersdorf. It was a multi-billion dollar project in a remote forest near the Czech border. The Bavarian government put all its resources behind it. There were huge demonstrations of up to two hundred thousand people at Wackersdorf on more than one occasion, and the police were very rough. Troops and tanks were brought in. But in the end the resistance made it impossible to build the plant, despite the governing party [the Christian Social Union] having a majority of 60 per cent or 62 per cent in the state parliament and despite the backing of the Federal agencies. It was an issue I felt very passionate about, a head-on confrontation between the population and the state. And the state lost. Given the context of Bavaria it was really quite unbelievable. They sank about three billion marks into the project and now they've abandoned it.

RL: According to you the state is being eroded, but what now is giving rise to the new myths? Social movements?

HME: I don't idealize the process, because I think that what is very often involved is simply organized self-interest. Self-interest may be enlightened or not. It can take all sorts of turns. I'm not predicting a new sort of utopia. But for Germany this is very, very positive because historically we have had such a strong fixation with state power. This change is not due to some sudden conversion on the part of the German people. It has more to do with advanced forms of production. There has to be an economic base to it all. You have an unprecedented degree of social wealth, a highly mobile and flexible workforce, an economy dependent on more and more complex networks. The primary and secondary sectors are dwindling in importance. Taylorism is obsolete, and hierarchical structures cannot cope with the challenges of a swiftly changing economic environment. That is why the bad habit—from the government's point of view—the bad habit of democracy has caught on and transformed the one-way street of government. Now you have a huge debate going on in society. There is a citizens' initiative in the district of Munich in which I live and at a meeting it held, there was an impassioned debate about a road proposal and the meeting voted against it. By law the city council had to take note of this vote. Theoretically it could overturn it, but that might carry a heavy price at the next election, so they'll think twice before they do it. I'm very much a federalist. There's a lot to be said for federalism, because, though it sounds a bit grand, one way of diffusing state power is to divide it up regionally and locally.

MC: However, the social movements which people talked about so

much in the early eighties really seem to have shrunk into the background.

HME: They have dissolved, but they have also become generalized, they have become part of everyday life. There's less open confrontation, there are fewer headlines. But, then, I have a place in the country, in Southern Bavaria, which really used to be the province of provinces, and now in the little town nearby there's an ecological food shop, a Third World Shop, and even a lesbian initiative. Twenty years ago that would have seemed simply mad, inconceivable. So the social movements have dispersed throughout society. But when an issue comes up, like the reprocessing plant at Wackersdorf, then the opposition crystallizes around it. National mobilizations take place and people come hundreds of miles to demonstrate.

RL Perhaps you need to have a state in order to have social movements?

HME That's true, and we still have too much of a state. On the other hand, there may be historical situations when you need a foreign policy. If tomorrow the tanks were out on the streets in East Germany, you would somehow have to deal with that situation, and that can't be done at a local or regional level. Only, our governments are also eroded in the sense that they are conceptually incapable of responding to such challenges, so that society has to take over that responsibility, the thinking process, too. As far as I can see, the government is not capable of taking on the job. Not because its members are all fools, though some of them may be, but because they work on a two or three-year time-scale—that is, until the next election. Their thinking is confined within this limit. They can't think ahead. So, who can take on this task? I don't think the intellectuals can do it. Ideally, many many people must create some sort of invisible laboratory. Perhaps you'll accuse me of being wildly optimistic, but I'm only pointing to a tendency that's there. It's almost like a geological process.

RL I'm interested by your reference to geology. You seem to be replacing the metaphor of society as machine with images taken from geology, geography or from recent mathematics (the fractal, for instance).

HME There may be an element of wishful thinking in this. But in the end you have to show your little card. I hang on to the idea that societies are not, in principle, incapable of self-organization. It's a nice thought.

MC I think the weakness of, say, West German government, which you point to, can be seen as a convergence with what has for a long time been the case in Italy, the combination of economic strength and political weakness. In Britain, perhaps, people haven't really noticed it or find it difficult to believe. The newspaper leader writers are always expecting the West Germans at last to use their economic power more aggressively and effectively to political ends. They keep waiting for this power to be exercised, but they've been expecting it for years and it doesn't happen.

HME: Yes, there is a paradox, the paradox of efficiency. Germans are lazy, they're spoiled, they think only of their leisure time, and yet the economy is booming. I fail to understand why! The work ethic is not what it used to be, and that has very positive aspects. I rather like it. Then there is the matter of corruption, which has also taken on unprecedented dimensions. You cannot expect the Germans to become Italians, but there are things which were unheard of before and which are now everyday occurrences—officials taking bribes, for instance.

MC: But I worry that, in fact, behind what you're saying there lurks a historically false notion of what the German—or Prussian—bureaucracy was like. I suspect their offices were always open to the public only at odd times—which indeed was one mark of their power. I also think, even in the 1880s say, that there were officials willing to let themselves be bribed. It's a question of image.

HME I'm not so sure about that. There is always corruption in any given society, but it worked in a different way, in the clubs and that sort of milieu. In Germany you couldn't walk up to an official and hand him an envelope. You would have gone to prison. But now somebody who needs his work permit extended does just that. There have been a lot of scandals related to that and to building contracts as well. It's an ambiguous thing, this loosening up of old taboos.

I have a neighbour in the country in Lower Bavaria, a farmer. He speaks a dialect which is quite incomprehensible, and yet this man has been to Saudi Arabia. He went because he is one of the very few people in the world who have managed to breed white peacocks.. I don't know how, but he discovered a market for them in Jeddah. You have to be a German to realize what that means. People like him never even went to the city before. I'm tempted to use an execrable word in order to describe this—what we have here is a post-modern attitude displayed by a Lower Bavarian farmer.

MC: Finally, what do you think about the situation in East Germany?

HME Of course the regime cannot last. It has run out of credibility, and it is remarkably incompetent. Time is running out, and reforms which might have worked three years ago may now prove insufficient. But I think it would be misleading to see things in terms of the so-called German Question. The GDR is just part of the East European crucible—the emergence of post-communist societies. It is anybody's guess what will come out of it, but I'm fairly certain that it won't be the reconstitution of the Reich (which is the real meaning of the term 'reunification'). Nobody in their right mind wants another Reich. As in any major historical crisis, the risks are high, especially with regard to the Soviet Union. But let us not forget that the societies east of the Elbe have, to their cost, undergone a profound political experience. Maybe something really new will come out of it. New possibilities, new dangers, and quite a few things we in the West have long ago stopped dreaming of. Up to now, the response of the political class in Brussels, London, Paris and Bonn, not to mention Washington, has been paternalistic and complacent. If that is all we have to offer, then the long-term outlook for Europe does not look very bright.

### **Intifada: Zionism, imperialism and Palestinian resistance**

by Phil Marshall

The Palestinian Uprising has raised new perspectives in the Middle East—yet Israel remains as intransigent as ever. This book shows how the Palestinians face a structure of dominance imposed on the region by imperialism, a structure which sets them against the Arab ruling classes as much as against Israel. 256 pages. £5.95 / US\$11.00

### **Women and perestroika**

by Chanie Rosenberg

Social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of women, wrote Marx in 1868. This book uses the facts made available through glasnost about life for women in the USSR to test the present, past and future status of Russian society. 128 pages. £3.95 / US\$6.50

### **Sex, Class and Socialism**

by Lindsey German

A Marxist analysis of the relationship between capitalism, women at work, the family and women's oppression, examining changing social conditions for women of the past two centuries—and the relation between feminism and socialism today. 256 pages. £5.95 / US\$11.00

### **International Socialism 2:44**

Articles on *Tienanmen Square and After*—an account of the crisis of the Chinese state, *Thatcher and the welfare state*—how welfare spending results from both the needs of the capitalist class and the struggle of the working class; *Animal Farm revisited*—on the paradox of George Orwell; and others.

128 pages. £2.50 / US\$4.00



**NEW  
TITLES  
Autumn  
1989**

All titles are available from good bookshops; also by mail order (please add 60p / \$1.00 per title for postage) from:

#### ***Bookmarks London***

265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE, England. Phone 01-802 6145.

#### ***Bookmarks Chicago***

PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616, USA. Phone 312-666-7337.

## *review*

Tim Wohlforth

# The Sixties in America

Last year's anniversary of 1968, the high-water mark of the 1960s student radicalization, can only partly explain the outpouring of books by participants in the events.\* I suspect that most of these had been thinking about writing a book on the 1960s for some time, and that the anniversary simply provided the assurance of some media attention. But it is also true that it has taken the sixties generation twenty years to evaluate the experience with a degree of historical perspective. The authors under review have been prompted by the political conservatism of the Reagan era, against which the remembered mood of the 1960s stands out in contrast. This is what gives all these books their wistful quality. Each writer, in his or her own way, tells us that the 1960s was the period when life was really lived intensely, when the politics, the thinking and the morality of a generation were shaped. Of course, it is possible that the conservative cycle has gone its full swing and we are at the beginning of at least a mildly leftward correction. Jessie Jackson's strength in the 1988 Democratic presidential primary race is suggestive of such a change. This could produce a young audience for these books and, in time, new writings on the 1960s which would view this period in an entirely different light. Taken together, these books are a very good starting point for the post-sixties generation to assess the experience of their forebears as well as a way for the sixties generation to come to terms with its own political heritage. The reward could be a somewhat more informed and rational left.

Maurice Isserman's book is unique in that it is not strictly a book about the 1960s, but rather an account of the decade and generation which preceded it. Isserman is thus a sixties leftist looking back at an earlier generation with which he had very little contact. But as someone who was very active on the left in both periods, I can testify that Isserman does an excellent job of recreating the 1950s and finding in those difficult times some very interesting people and ideas. It is certainly not hard to show the discontinuities between the two periods. It was the collapse of the Communist Party, dominant on the left since the 1920s, which created the conditions for the emergence of a New Left student movement in the 1960s. But although Isserman's account of the crisis of the CPUSA, provoked by the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, is adequate, it is by no means the strongest

part of his book. Others have written in more detail on the question and much work remains to be done.<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to place the crisis of Communism within its international framework, as this helps to clarify what is unique as well as what the American New Left shares with similar formations elsewhere. All these books, with the notable exceptions of Katsiaficas and Cauter, suffer from parochialism. Communist Parties in all countries were thrown into crisis in 1956. This produced in each country dissident radical currents, with former Communists seeking to create a New Left. What made this process distinctive in the United States was the isolation of the Communists, who had been largely purged from mainstream life by a combination of witch-hunt and prosperity. As a result, a dissident Communist New Left was quite weak—the journal *Studies on the Left*, published in Madison, Wisconsin, was the best example of this trend—and only a trickle of former Communists joined the ranks of the dissident Old Left, made up primarily of Trotskyists. By way of contrast, the crisis of the British Communists produced a more intellectually vital New Left—the best examples were E.P. Thompson's *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*, and Perry Anderson's *New Left Review*—and more former Communists strengthened the small Trotskyist groups. At the same time the British Labour Party remained the dominant force on the left. During the 1960s student radicalism surged largely outside of it, yet the party was there to reabsorb the tired youth as this radicalization faded. As a result of both processes there was greater continuity between Old and New Left.

### The Red Thread

What is fascinating, however, yet barely explored in the Gitlin, Miller and Isserman books, is the continuity which did exist between Old and New Lefts through the children of Communists and Progressives. All evidence indicates that red and pink diaper babies played important roles at all levels of SDS, influenced by the thinking in their homes at the time they had become conscious beings. In most cases this coincided with the 1950s, when the Communist parents had either left the party or, in order to protect their children from what they faced as part of a hounded movement, brought them up as socially conscious liberals, rather than as educated Marxists or party people. These children shared a common mood, an ethos, rather than a specific party line or theoretical heritage.

The red diaper babies brought to SDS a strong sense of commitment

---

\* Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer . . . The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*, Basic Books, New York 1987; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, Bantam Books, New York 1987; James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1987; Mary King, *Freedom Song*, William Morrow and Company, New York 1987; David Cauter, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968*, Harper & Row, New York 1988; George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, South End, Boston 1987.

<sup>1</sup> See David Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, New York 1959; Joseph Scarabin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957*, Berkeley 1972.

to democracy combined with a deep hostility to any form of anti-Communist witch-hunting. They were sceptical about American society. While almost all these children refused to accept the Soviet Union as a model—something their parents had already done in many cases—they rejected the Cold War and resisted lining up with the United States internationally. Most were uninterested in probing the question of Communism and its history, believing they had put it behind them. Few had more than a rudimentary knowledge of Marxism, and they were far more likely to be acquainted with Max Weber or C. Wright Mills. It would certainly be a mistake to think that this New Left, and I include the many students who came from non-Communist backgrounds, had come to terms with the Old Left intellectually, in the fashion of an E.P. Thompson, Milovan Djilas or Fernando Claudín. For this reason, in the late 1960s, it was possible for them to embrace crude forms of 'Marxism-Leninism' with an enthusiasm equal to that with which they had dismissed the mere discussion of such matters in the early part of the decade.

The bulk of Isserman's book is devoted to dissident left circles influenced directly and indirectly by Max Shachtman. Shachtman was a follower of Leon Trotsky who broke away from mainstream Trotskyism in 1940 and argued that the USSR represented a new form of class rule, while Trotsky continued to maintain that it was a 'workers' state' though 'degenerated'.<sup>2</sup> Shachtman took most of the intellectuals with him when he split from the orthodox Socialist Workers Party. In the 1950s he maintained a minute sect, the Independent Socialist League (ISL), which had a somewhat more energetic youth affiliate, the Young Socialist League (YSL), headed by Mike Harrington.

The ideas of this group had influence considerably beyond its small membership. It had links, though largely historical, with the New York intellectuals (James T. Farrell, the *Partisan Review* crowd, Harvey Swados, Dwight McDonald).<sup>3</sup> Former member Irving Howe was publishing *Dissent*, which shared a common theory of Soviet society but positioned itself at the time to the right of the Shachtman group. The radical pacifists, such as A.J. Muste, Bayard Rustin and Dave Dellinger, were also influenced by the Shachtmanite world outlook. The Shachtmanites produced a lively newspaper, *Labor Action*, and maintained about as open and democratic an internal life as could be found in groups that adhered to a Leninist tradition. Its youth organization, particularly after the disintegration of the Communist Party's Labor Youth League (LYL), had little opportunity but almost no competition in the student field. Above all, the Shachtmanites had championed the notion that socialism and democracy were indissolubly linked. This gave them important moral as well as political capital.

Certainly the Shachtmanites were well positioned to replace the Communist Party among the Old Left formations, and to influence

---

<sup>2</sup> See my article 'Life with Shachtman' in *Against the Current*, Detroit 1988, a chapter from my forthcoming book *The Prophet's Children*

<sup>3</sup> See Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, New York 1987

the new generation of sixties student radicals. Yet this did not happen. In 1957 Shachtman proposed unification with the Socialist Party, while his organization published a pamphlet suggesting to the dissidents breaking from the Communist Party that they also join in this project. However, the Socialist Party had become a grouping of embittered anti-Communists who had thrown in their lot with the 'West' and were not even willing to share the same platform with dissident Communists, for discussion purposes. Shachtman endorsed this position and by the time he was finally allowed to join the Socialist Party he had abandoned his radical heritage, embracing positions that placed him well to the right, even within the SP. Supporting the wing of the Democratic Party around Senator Henry Jackson and the George Meany leadership of the AFL-CIO, he went on to endorse American foreign policy, even the invasion of Cuba and the Vietnam War. It is therefore very understandable why this section of the Old Left had so little impact on the New Left. It was not orthodoxy or 'Leninism' which stood in the way; rather, the Shachtman tendency was moving politically in the opposite direction from the general movement of the new student radicals. Even Irving Howe, whose journal *Dissent* was respected by the new leaders of SDS, and who did not move as far to the right as Shachtman, let his bitter anti-communism blind him in his relations with SDS. He was not able to appreciate the group's sincere dedication to democratic values and its disavowal of the Soviet Union as a socialist model.

One is tempted to speculate that the radicalism of the 1960s could have taken a different course if the crisis of the Old Left in the 1950s had produced a viable broad left critical of American domestic and foreign policy. It would be wrong to place all the blame for this failure on Shachtman and the Norman Thomas Socialist Party. I still find it amazing that the Gates group, at one point the clear majority of the Communist Party, was unable to produce any kind of organization after its break with the Party. Their faction was built on the sand of a disintegrating membership made up largely of people leaving organized party politics. Most were not willing to stop half-way. This suggests that the party had been decomposing beneath the surface for the decade before Hungary, with many members remaining in it out of habit and tradition rather than conviction, a generation largely spent. But I still believe that some of these former Communists would have remained in some form of party politics if they had seen something viable. Clearly the Gates leaders had neither the energy nor the perspective for such an endeavour, and they certainly got little help from other radicals.

Isserman deserves credit for his long-overdue attention to the radical pacifist movement in the 1950s and early 1960s, a small band which had a major influence on SNCC and the whole Southern civil rights movement and which also contributed, generally positively, to the 1960s anti-war movement. It would be wrong to suggest, however—as Isserman and all our other authors seem to do—that this was the only link between the Old and the New Left. Apart from the contribution of children of Communists, many former Communists, while keeping out of party politics, continued to be politically active as individuals—for



example, in Women's Strike for Peace, in Friends of SNCC, and in the McCarthy and McGovern electoral efforts. The Communist Party and its youth organization, the WEB DuBois Clubs, were active throughout the 1960s, particularly in the peace movement. Discontinuity was the dominant feature of radicalism in the 1960s, but there were also incidences of continuity.

One gaping hole in Isserman's analysis of the 1950s is the lack of any discussion of the mainstream Trotskyists, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). I feel this is due to a general New Left prejudice against any elements of continuity between Old and New Left. The SWP had done a better job of surviving the fifties than the Shachtmanites and therefore had a larger membership and a better apparatus. More important was its formation of a youth organization, the Young Socialist Alliance. I was the first National Secretary of that organization, so I freely admit to a possible prejudice in its favour. But it can hardly be denied that the YSA was an effective, if small, organization when the sixties student radicalization began, and that it permitted the SWP to play a major role in organizing the Anti-War movement throughout the decade.

The Shachtmanite-led Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), youth organization of the SP, was larger than the YSA as the sixties began. But Shachtman's rightward turn brought about an internal struggle which paralysed it through most of the sixties. Only with the split-off, in the late 1960s, of the International Socialists (IS) did this trend have any real impact on student politics. The IS, though much smaller than the YSA, played a role in the formation of the Peace and Freedom Party, and in the building of a militant opposition within the Teamsters Union. The story of the sixties was not entirely the story of SDS; a case can be made that the contribution of some who learned from the Old Left turned out to be quite positive.

### The SDS Radicalization

There are now two books out on SDS, Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties* and James Miller's *Democracy Is In The Streets*. The books are very different and they complement each other. Gitlin, who was once president of SDS, combines a memoir with an attempt at a broad portrayal of the mood and events of the sixties. While he does not completely succeed—is it possible to capture the sixties in a single book?—he does get closer than any other writer I have come across. This is a task requiring more than empirical description, and Gitlin does his best to bring back the ambience and the personality of the period as the main actors of the left felt it. Particularly interesting is Gitlin's discussion of the 1950s roots of sixties counter-culturalism—both the Beat Generation writers and rock and roll. From this approach, quite different from that in Isserman's book, we are able to perceive the preparation of the 1960s in undercurrents that developed in the 1950s.

Gitlin gives us a most important account of the political evolution of SDS during the 1960s. SDS began as a group of students, primarily at Ann Arbor, whose radicalism was barely distinguished from the

larger liberal milieu around them. They shared an intense commitment to democracy, a concern for the poor, a belief in civil rights, and a worry about nuclear war. While rejecting the Soviet Union as a model, they perceived that anti-Communism had acted to tame wide sections of the liberal and social-democratic left, to enlist it, wittingly or unwittingly, on the side of America's ruling elite, and therefore to undercut commitment to social change.

In the radicalization of SDS, a process which began in 1964, Gitlin places considerable emphasis on Lyndon Johnson's and Hubert Humphrey's manoeuvres at the 1964 Democratic Party Convention which prevented the seating of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) delegation. While the MFDP issue destroyed most illusions that SDS leaders had held about the Democratic Party as a vehicle for positive social change, the intensification of United States involvement in the Vietnam War quickly supplanted domestic concerns among a whole generation of students. The fact that this war was being conducted by a Democratic Administration deepened the gulf between the SDS and the liberal wing of the American political system. A group which had only two or three years earlier viewed itself as a kind of intellectual gadfly, the conscience of the liberal reform movement, became an adversarial, confrontational opponent of a state now headed by avowedly liberal Democrats.

This new radicalization and confrontation soon shifted to a mood of despair which, already in 1968, was beginning to encourage counter-productive adventures. Gitlin describes how many in SDS became convinced that their actions were having absolutely no impact on government policy, *precisely at the moment when the anti-war sentiment had grown so powerfully within the country that American withdrawal from Vietnam was becoming inevitable*. What Gitlin does not appear to understand is that this disorientation, which set the scene for what he aptly calls the 'implosion' of SDS, had its roots in the decision of the SDS leadership to abandon national anti-war protests after 1965.

Luckily for the left as a whole, others took up the fight to build the militant mass anti-war movement which SDS had initiated and abandoned. The key forces involved in sustaining the coalitions that organized the demonstrations were the Old Left SWP, the Old Left pacifists, and, in a more inconsistent fashion, the Old Left Communist Party.<sup>4</sup> This important aspect of the sixties movement does not get sufficient coverage in the Gitlin book—another example of New Left blindness to elements of continuity. Is it possible that the schism between Old and New Left, which developed more fully in the United States than anywhere else in the world, was not wholly beneficial?

The strength of Miller's book is that he takes the ideas of SDS seriously. There is a tendency among commentators on the sixties to lose themselves in mood, colour and individual examples of extravagant behaviour, missing the serious, thoughtful side of the movement.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Fred Halstead, *Out Now!*, New York 1978, and Nancy Zaroulis/Gerald Sullivan, *Who Speaks Up?*, New York, 1984.

Miller spends a third of this book explaining the background and meaning of the Port Huron Statement. The writers of that document, particularly Tom Hayden and Al Haber, based their thinking primarily on the American academic intellectuals C. Wright Mills and Arnold Kaufman. This contrasts sharply with the European New Left, which drew its inspiration from dissident Marxists like Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch and Antonio Gramsci. But there were, of course, some intellectual interconnections. Most SDSers read the British New Left journals and the American journal, *Studies on the Left*, which represented an amalgam of American non-Marxist and European dissident Marxist influences. Mills himself drew indirectly from Marxism. He was a student of Hans Gerth, who was educated in the German social democratic tradition.

SDS educed from this American tradition a unique set of ideas which were part of its attractive power in the later 1960s. These ideas developed out of a radical-democratic populist tradition, rather than the class orientation that persisted in modified form in similar circles in Europe. SDS perceived the United States as a mass society dominated by a power elite. Even organizations formed to represent the masses, such as trade unions, had become bureaucratized and could no longer be effectively controlled by ordinary people. The representative system of democracy had become corrupted by those with the resources to monopolize mass culture.

SDS's alternative to the mass society was 'participatory democracy'. The term, which seems to come more from Kaufman than Mills, was never clearly developed by the early SDS leaders. They hoped to develop grassroots movements on a community level where face-to-face communication among ordinary people was possible. These new movements, at least as originally conceived, would not replace representative institutions, but rather supplement and invigilate them. This perspective proved to be extremely popular in the 1960s, gaining influence far beyond SDS ranks. It touched deeply a generation which felt alienated and without influence in a society acting in a way of which they disapproved. As students grew more and more frustrated with the Vietnam War and with their inability to put a stop to it through normal political processes, the SDS vision of participatory democracy suggested a more humane and controllable society.

### The Process of Decline

The fact that little progress has been made since the 1960s in subordinating contemporary society to its constituents suggests that the ideas of the early SDS continue to have meaning for us today. Of course these ideas are open to a utopian interpretation, such as became prevalent during the decline of SDS at the end of the sixties. It is simply unworkable to try to *substitute* direct decentralized democratic forms for representative ones in a complex industrial society, rather than to use such forms in a *supplemental* way.<sup>3</sup> Experimentation with

---

<sup>3</sup> I deal with this problem within the context of post-capitalist society in my essay 'The Transition to the Transition', *New Left Review* 130, November-December 1981.

the structure of SDS itself, inspired by this notion, proved to be disastrous.

Miller's description of the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), an attempt to build a movement of the poor on a community level, is also quite valuable. In 1964 SDS began a series of experimental projects to transform its theoretical ideas into action, and much of its energy went into ERAP, which was greatly influenced by the success of SNCC in the South and was, in large part, an imitative effort among poor whites in the North. When I look back over the more than twenty years since ERAP was begun, my own feeling is that its marginal successes were nowhere commensurate to the energy put into the effort. The strategy was wrong and its effect upon the SDS cadre quite harmful. While the New Left eschewed doctrinairism, ERAP was a schematically conceived project abstracted from doctrine rather than based upon reality. It is not possible to construct a movement because it *ought* to exist: the left can play a critical part only in movements which arise independently out of the social and political life of a country. SNCC, for example, far from creating the civil rights movement, was actually created by it and then went on to play an important role in leading it. By contrast, there was no movement among poor whites in the North, despite the poverty under which they lived. Perhaps there *should* have been such a movement, but it did not exist. It is doubtful if there would have been a movement among the poor Blacks of the South in the same period if it had not been for the existence of the racial caste system.

SDS's efforts to create such a movement produced meagre results. In Newark a tenants' organization was built by Tom Hayden, largely made up, as I understand it, of Blacks, while in Cleveland Sharon Jeffries had some success for a while in building a welfare rights group. But the full-time work of hundreds of SDSers had minimal impact on the various communities, and almost none on the United States of the 1960s. I do not suggest that a more 'class-oriented' project—say, work in trade unions—would have achieved much more in that period. ERAP, however, did have a major impact on SDS.

It was in ERAP groups that SDS experimented with living collectives ruled by *consensus* rather than by majority vote. Participatory democracy soon came to mean consensus decision-making—a very unwieldy mechanism requiring interminable meetings. It was also of doubtful democratic value, since the most stubborn, as well as the most gifted at manipulating group psychology, tended to have undue power. Consensus rule soon generated an anarchistic attitude towards any delegation of authority. Miller describes how a consensus-oriented anti-leadership group totally paralysed the national office of SDS from 1965 on just at the time when thousands of people began flooding into SDS. It was impossible even to process membership applications. He suggests, I believe quite correctly, that the decline of SDS was actually being prepared through this process of internal disorganization right at the moment of SDS's greatest growth. I am struck by the parallel with the history of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). That organization was also subject to a process of self-destruction stemming

from the antics of a misguided group of American-bred anarchists, the Overalls Brigade, originating from the Pacific North-west. This faction launched a campaign against the 'centralization' of the already quite weakly structured national office of the IWW, so that when the IWW succumbed to government repression following World War I, it was already in decline.<sup>6</sup>

SDS began as an organization of radical students oriented to the campus. But in 1964, with the launch of ERAP, it turned its attention away from students and the campus, just as a profound radicalization was beginning there. The fantastic growth of SDS, from no more than eight thousand in 1964-65 to between sixty thousand and one hundred thousand in 1968-69, occurred because of the activity of a minority who led SDS's efforts in the anti-war movement. It was SDS's leadership of the first national anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Washington in 1965, combined with the appeal of its openness and the democratic intellectual tradition exemplified by the Port Huron Statement, which accounts for this growth. But the irony is that, after this major success, SDS proceeded to abandon national anti-war demonstrations. If this movement continued, it was primarily due, as we have already noted, to the responsible activity of remnants of the Old Left. Of course SDS continued to be a central part of the resistance to the War through its anti-draft work, local demonstrations, and reluctant participation in a national movement organized by others.

It is understandable that older SDS leaders should have searched for a way to build a movement that reached out beyond students to broader strata of the American people—after all, one can be a student for only so long. In a sense, this was a uniquely American New Left dilemma. The very weakness of the Old Left, which had not produced any mass political organizations like the Labour, Socialist and Communist parties of Europe, gave radical students few options for a future political home. This does not mean that SDS should have given up its orientation to the American campus, but it does suggest that older SDS leaders needed to work on creating a broader political movement of the left.

Neither Gitlin nor Miller gives, in my opinion, a satisfactory explanation for the 'implosion' of SDS. Miller devotes too little space to the problem, while Gitlin does a fine job of describing the political mood of despair and wild, violent revolutionism which swept through SDS in the kind of way that revivals swept through the Burnt District in early nineteenth-century rural America. He deplores the mad sectarianism, strident Marxism-Leninism, the downright stupidity of the period. But was this madness inevitable? Is it all to be blamed on outside 'invaders' from the Old Left? Or to pose it bluntly: where in the world were the old SDS leaders when this was all going on? What alternatives did they have to offer at the time?

I am very well aware of being a 'Monday morning quarterback'. I was

---

<sup>6</sup> See Paul Brissenden, *The IWW: A Study of American Syndicalism*, New York 1919, pp 221 ff., and Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, New York 1969, pp. 137-38.

around at the time and what I had to say then was in its way as off-the-wall and sectarian as the antics of those more intimately involved with SDS. Yet there is little purpose in studying history if we cannot learn from the mistakes we all made. Was there an alternative road for SDS and, most important, its graduates; a road that was practical at that time, but which none of the prominent actors advocated? I believe there was.

### The Final Implosion

The implosion of SDS occurred at its 1969 convention when the Worker-Student Alliance faction led by the Progressive Labor Party won a majority of the delegates.<sup>7</sup> The opposition to the PLP was split into two factions: Revolutionary Youth Movement I (RYM I) and Revolutionary Youth Movement II (RYM II). RYM I was also known as the Weathermen and soon became underground terrorists. RYM II was led by Bob Avakian and Mike Klonsky and spawned a series of Maoist 'Marxist-Leninist' sects, including the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). The old mainstream leadership of SDS was not only physically absent but had no voice which reflected its outlook. How is this to be explained? I can think of no other example where the founding generation of leaders had such little impact on their organization four or five years later.

It is insufficient to blame the implosion totally on the PLP. One must ask the question why the PLP was so successful within SDS that it not only gained a majority at a convention, but forced the opposition to mimic its 'Marxist-Leninism'. It was a deeper matter than just good faction organization. I believe the PLP swept through the SDS because it represented an alternative, a way forward for students seeking to build a permanent left movement in the United States. The PLP identified the working class as the force capable of bringing socialism to America; it popularized the classical Marxist methodology and scenario; it counterposed party organization to the paralysis of consensus anarchy. This alternative was certainly *not* a scientifically correct one. While the natural constituency for socialist ideas in the United States must include the working class, it requires a broader definition, as the older SDS leadership had for many years correctly, if a bit one-sidedly, pointed out. There is a world of difference between mouthing Marxist phraseology and developing the Marxist methodology in a new world situation. A party can have an organizational form which is open, pluralistic, broad, or it can become a narrow, elitist, personally dominated sect. My point is that this was *a perspective*. The SDS membership was not offered a meaningful alternative perspective.

What could have been proposed in 1969? It is *now* very clear to me that what was needed was a broad socialist party in the Debsian tradition, staunchly anti-imperialist, radically democratic and pluralistic, a bit messy and sloppy internally, capable of absorbing and reflecting

---

<sup>7</sup> Neither the Miller nor the Gitlin book does a satisfactory job of describing the convention and the internal struggles within SDS which led up to it. For more information I suggest the older study: Kilpatrick Sale, SDS, New York 1972.

the left activists as they and their movements evolved. It would have been a home for the Black activists, the feminist movement which was only then coming into being, and militants from the trade unions, and it would have been capable of 'greening' as the ecological movement developed. Yes, it would have been somewhat like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), launched over a decade later. But it would have been positioned to its left, reflecting the political temper of the 1960s.

Let us continue for a moment with our speculations in the realm of the 'could have'. If the New Left had consciously negated the Old Left—that is, had studied its history and thought through its mistakes, rather than simply turning its back on that experience—it might have been able to educate a new generation. Instead, the questions that were ignored simply burst forth a few years later, as a new generation rediscovered 'Marxism-Leninism'. To paraphrase Marx from the *18th Brumaire*, the second time around it was true farce. The first generation of SDS leaders have some responsibility for this appalling backwardness.

Miller's picture of Tom Hayden is particularly telling in this respect. Hayden had completely lost his bearings in this period. He promoted a totally uncritical adulation of the North Vietnamese leadership, made statements encouraging violent confrontations, and almost joined the Weathermen. Hypnotized by the media's 'bad boy' image of himself, he was not the only one on the left to allow such flattery to unbalance him. At the same time, quite inconsistently, he kept his options open with the power-holders within the Democratic Party. Hayden's actions may have been understandable in the mood of the times, but they certainly cannot be described as leadership.

The New Left got little help from the Old Left. The Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party<sup>9</sup> adhered, each in its own way, to the Leninist party model. The 1960s were seen as an opportunity to add a little flesh to the already well constructed bones of the cadre sect. They saw no need for a broader left party in the real meaning of the term, rooted in and reflecting a *movement* of some size. They also missed a historic opportunity to contribute to the future of the American left. The price they paid was to shrink back to their pre-1960s size under the unfavourable conditions of the 1980s.

Let us hope that the new movement coming into being on campuses today will learn these lessons from the past. Unlike the 1960s generation, today's students do not reject the preceding generation of radicals—the danger lies, rather, in an uncritical emulation of the sixties radicals. At the 1988 national student convention at Rutgers, delegates seemed to be hoping for a new Port Huron. Yet moments at the convention suggested more a repeat of the problems occurring at the

<sup>8</sup> One of the very few people thinking along these lines at the time was James Weinstein. See his *The Decline of Socialism 1919–1925*, New York 1967

<sup>9</sup> Other Trotskyist groups were just as bad or worse, including the Spartacist League and the group I headed, the Workers League

tail end of the sixties student movement. Groups from Berkeley and elsewhere combated centralism in the name of consensus, while a coalition of minority students brought the proceedings to a halt with complaints about the almost all-white unrepresentative character of the gathering. This suggests that today's radical students cannot help but begin where the sixties generation left off. They must break through the mystique of the sixties, looking at that period critically so that they will be able to go beyond its very severe limitations.

### The Civil Rights Struggle

Mary King's *Freedom Song* is a marvellous book about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), written by one of its leading activists. It helps to compensate for the weaknesses of the other books reviewed here. For Gitlin and Miller, the civil rights struggle is a kind of backdrop, a moment in the developing consciousness of the white student radical movement, which dominates centre stage. While this relationship did exist, one could just as easily reverse matters and place the civil rights movement at the fore, since it brought about a change in the very nature of the United States.

Mary King's book is, as its subtitle indicates, a 'personal story' and this gives the book much of its vigour. As we learn about Mary King's background, a white woman from a religious family with deep roots in the South, it becomes understandable that some from that small moral current that always existed among white Southerners would come forward and be part of the civil rights movement. Mary King's personal story is also significant because, together with Casey Hayden, she wrote a document critical of attitudes toward women that were prevalent in SNCC and in the left in general, a document representing an important stage in the birth of the feminist movement.

While SNCC developed contemporaneously with SDS, it was far more than a black version of SDS. Most importantly, it was part of the leadership of a genuine mass movement seeking to bring about fundamental, yes revolutionary, transformation. Blacks in the South lived under an institutionalized *caste* system based on race that was as rigid and as brutally enforced as apartheid in South Africa. While conditions were somewhat better in the North, there could be no real civil rights anywhere as long as a system of segregation existed in the South, supported by local and state government without fear of intervention from the Federal government. This made the civil rights struggle in the South a struggle for Black liberation as a whole.

The Southern caste system was economically based on the use of cheap Black labour to produce cotton. The break-up of the caste structure coincided with the mechanization of cotton farming. The two processes led to a mass exodus of Blacks from the countryside, with many of them participating in the economic diversification and general prosperity of the Southern cities. King's book is not about this overall political, social and economic process—a story which has yet to be told well in a single book—but it is necessary to keep this process in mind in order to understand the fundamental changes



that followed the triumph of the civil rights movement in the middle 1960s.

The structure of SNCC is extremely interesting. There has been much romanticism in the Leninist left about 'professional revolutionaries', a romanticism that has caused a good deal of harm. Those who have built political parties based on this concept have created sectarian organizations with elitist ideologies and, sometimes, cultist distortions. Yet professional revolutionaries are as American as apple pie, going back to Tom Paine, who helped organize the American Revolution. SNCC stood in this tradition and was, without question, an organization of professional revolutionaries strikingly reminiscent of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW was a very loosely structured band of full-time labour organizers who hopped freights and travelled the country going from one strike scene or free speech fight to the next. It was not successful in creating permanent union institutions but, under conditions of great repression, it did a better job than the more conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) in popularizing unionism and making the first attempts to organize the less-skilled workers. The IWW was extremely democratic and deeply hostile to all forms of elitism. It led by encouraging the self-movement and self-leadership of the masses.

SNCC was formed by Southern Black students in order to challenge segregation through non-violent means. Soon joined by whites like Mary King, it became an integrated cadre organization led by Blacks whose professional revolutionaries worked full time as organizers, living together and receiving a pittance for wages. While Mary King is a little vague on figures, it appears that the permanent organization never rose much above two hundred staff members, loosely administered through occasional staff conferences where consensus dominated. Many more people were organized in the North into Friends of SNCC; one thousand students came down South for a one-shot summer project, and SNCC organized various grassroots groups of Blacks in the South. It is hard to conceive of an organization less centralized and less elitist in ideology. Its beliefs were best personified by Bob Moses, who practised a style of 'non-leadership' by which SNCC staffers quietly encouraged the emergence of leaders from the Black masses themselves. While there were no doubt some false and manipulative moments in this process, on the whole SNCC was extremely successful. Fannie Lou Hammer of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was probably the best example of the kind of leader it was able to nurture among the masses.

A crucial part of Mary King's story is her very honest account of the frustrating relationship between the Southern civil rights movement and the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. The tensions became critical when SNCC decided to turn its attention to a campaign to register Black voters in the Black Belt areas of the Deep South, thereby testing Federal resolve to enforce the law of the land. Although Kennedy was personally committed to civil rights, he ultimately bowed to the pressure of the white-racist Southern wing of his party and never went further than sending Federal observers into the

area. His refusal to send in marshals to protect Blacks seeking to register clearly cost the lives of a number of civil right activists.

The summer of 1964 was the turning point in this relationship, as well as in the whole Southern civil rights struggle. SNCC organized to bring one thousand activists, mainly white students, to Mississippi for the summer. This campaign got off to a frightening start when three SNCC activists—Jim Cheney, Andy Goodman and Mickey Schwerner—were murdered. The national furore forced the Johnson Administration to launch a serious Federal investigation which exposed the murderers as local law enforcement officers. Yet Federal inactivity persisted throughout the summer. In the meantime SNCC had organized a new grassroots political movement, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). This organization, composed of the poorest Blacks in the rural South, challenged the white-racist-controlled Mississippi Democratic Party slate at the national party convention.

The reaction of Johnson was to appoint Hubert Humphrey as his point man in seeking to convince the MFDP to withdraw its request to be seated as the official delegation. This was the price Humphrey was expected to pay to secure the party's vice-presidential nomination. Johnson hoped to gain support for his candidacy from the white-racist section of the party even though these politicians refused to commit themselves to support the national ticket. Humphrey then enlisted the aid of the UAW and Joe Rauh, Jr., a liberal who was the lawyer for both the UAW and SNCC. The MFDP held firm, but a compromise was eventually forced upon them which seated the white-racist delegation but held open two seats for the MFDP. This action had a deep radicalizing impact on the SNCC leadership as well as on SDS and many independent students throughout the country.

### Towards the Rainbow Coalition

The Johnson-Humphrey pragmatism did not work. The white-racist Democrats bolted the party while Goldwater carried the South, but *only* the South. The inevitable could no longer be postponed. The new administration passed a voting rights law and Federal registrars opened up the political process in the South to the Blacks. The Republican Party developed serious strength throughout the South and the Black vote became critical to the Democratic Party in the region. The stage was set for the emergence of Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition in 1984 and 1988.

It is important today to remember the treachery of the Democratic Party leaders and many prominent liberals in this period, not only in seeking to postpone the inevitable in civil rights, but also in escalating United States involvement in the Vietnam War. There were reasons for the radicalization of the student movement and its increasing alienation from the liberal establishment. Because of the way our political system is structured, it is not always possible for the left movement to avoid a relationship with the Democratic Party. However, such a relationship must be based upon independent movements which determine their own agenda. The MFDP was this

kind of movement and the Rainbow Coalition has the potential to be so today.

We must ask about SNCC the same question we asked about SDS: why did such a promising organization collapse in such a short period of time? SNCC led a broad radical-democratic movement of Blacks which *partially* achieved its objectives. Segregation as a legally enforced system of American apartheid was wiped out and the political system which had enforced it was opened up to Black participation. This was a major victory changing institutions which had been in place since the collapse of Reconstruction after the Civil War—a victory which, it could be argued, created the conditions for SNCC's demise as an organization. However, the needs of the Blacks in the South were by no means fully met. The majority of Blacks in the country as a whole have not experienced any improvement in their conditions, and the poorest have suffered a *decline* in income in the last few years, because of the Reagan Administration's cuts in entitlement programmes. The main benefactors from the civil rights movement have been middle-class Blacks and the small number of poor Blacks who have been able to make it into the middle classes. The victories in *democratic* rights have simply created better conditions for the struggle for *social* and *economic* rights. Therefore there has certainly been a need for a grass-roots militant Black organization whose aim is to increase the political power of Southern Blacks in order to achieve social justice. The MFDP expressed such an approach in embryo. Yes, there was a need for SNCC after 1968—but SNCC needed to change.

SNCC activists certainly realized this need for change and it provoked an internal debate between those who wished to centralize the organization and run it more professionally, and those who wished to persist in the decentralized consensus manner. Mary King supported the latter faction and I believe she was wrong. A way of working together under conditions of mass upheaval and social warfare could not be expected to be workable in an organization geared for the long-haul struggle. The wear and tear on human beings alone could not be sustained. SNCC needed to transform itself into a less romantic but more permanent entity.

The problem was that this organizational discussion was sidetracked by a more fundamental development: the spread of Black Nationalist thinking among SNCC's Black cadre. I would agree with Mary King in her assessment of this development as largely harmful. A distinction needs to be made between Black *consciousness*, which includes as constituent elements Black *leadership* and Black *power*, and Black *nationalism*, which is *separatist*. SNCC, as we have seen, was always led by Blacks. Further, it played a critical role in developing the consciousness of Blacks, their pride in themselves and in their heritage. The concept of Black power first emerged from SNCC and found organizational expression in the MFDP and then in Stokely Carmichael's Black Panther Party in Lowndes County. Yet, during the period when it was effective, SNCC was an integrated organization which won the victories it did because of its ability to combine the self-mobilization of Blacks with support from whites in the North.

This was not accidental; it flowed from the actual position of Blacks within American society. It is extremely interesting that while, for a period of time, Black nationalism had significant influence among ghetto-dwellers in Northern cities, it never gained strength in the Southern Black Belt. In the one area of the country where there was a material basis for a Black Nation, there was no significant separatist movement. Blacks in the South realized that their future lay in combining their self-organization with a search for allies in the rest of the American population. This is, of course, the central concept behind the Rainbow Coalition. To the extent that the Black Nationalist movement contributed to Black consciousness and pride, it played a progressive role. To the extent that separatist rhetoric blinded Blacks to the need to seek allies in other American constituencies—the trade unions, white liberals, the women's movement, gays, other minorities—it hindered the Black cause.

As Mary King describes it, Black Nationalism swept the SNCC cadre as a form of its own self-expression; little thought was given to what programme it would yield to help poor blacks in the South. This process was further complicated by the role of a vanguardist group of ideologues, the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), which entered SNCC in this period and helped to poison the internal atmosphere in much the same way as PLP functioned within SDS. The rise of Black nationalism within SNCC was accompanied by the decline of SNCC as an effective organization. The self-expression of middle-class Blacks in this instance ran counter to the social interests of the mass of poor Blacks in the South.

It is difficult to read Mary King's book without being overwhelmed by a sense of the political change this movement wrought in the United States. Of course it was not all the doing of SNCC. Martin Luther King, Jr. played a special role in reaching millions, while even the conservative NAACP made its contribution, particularly through its legal arm, the NAACP Defense Fund. We live now in a different and better country. It was the Southern Black vote which put into Congress Southern Senators who felt it necessary to vote down the Bork nomination to the Supreme Court. Then we have Jackson's powerful showing in the South on Super Tuesday, winning not only 91 per cent of the Black vote but 7 per cent of the white vote as well (10 per cent of the 30-44 age group). Union households went 35 per cent to Jackson.<sup>10</sup> This is a different South from the one Mary King describes in her gripping book.

### The International Context

David Caute's *The Year of the Barricades* and George Katsiaficas's *The Imagination of the New Left* help to locate the American left movement in its international context, above all in the remarkable year 1968 when some form of radical upsurge was taking place in almost all countries of the world. The two books are quite different. Caute's is a thoughtful journalistic account of the main happenings of that year,

---

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, 10 March 1968

although it was so full of events that he can't avoid a certain superficiality. For instance, the major student demonstrations in Mexico in September are covered in only two pages. Yet the ensuing repression put a majority of the active Mexican Left in prison and represented a grave setback from which it only really began to recover a decade later. It would have been interesting to probe why, in the 'Year of Revolution', such a major defeat occurred in a Third World country. Caute does not ask the question; in fact Caute does not generally ask questions. His work is descriptive, though on this level quite useful.

Katsiaficas takes the opposite approach of a 'global analysis of 1968', and he certainly does not shy away from theoretical matters. Katsiaficas seeks to develop a theory of revolution drawn from Herbert Marcuse, with results more rooted in Hegel than in Marx. Katsiaficas believes that there are periods of global political and social eruptions during which human beings rise above the local, particular and petty to embrace what he calls 'the *eros* effect'. He mentions 1848-49, 1905-07 and 1917-19 as earlier examples of 'world historical movements' in which 'the potentiality of the human species as a species-being unfolds'.<sup>11</sup>

The *eros* effect in 1968, in Katsiaficas's view, was the development of a mass movement, organized as a kind of worldwide general strike, engaged in self-movement, becoming conscious of itself, practising a participatory direct democracy, and seeking decentralized forms of social and political life. The student movement is seen as the main engine propelling this emancipatory drive. Certainly such ideas were quite widespread during that year, in the American SDS or among the German SDS and during the May-June Days in France. However, Katsiaficas fails to answer a number of the questions raised by his assessment of 1968. Can *all* the happenings in 1968 be brought under the common umbrella of a student movement devoted to Katsiaficas' vision of the political *eros*? What exactly did this global revolutionary movement accomplish? Why did it decline so rapidly following 1968? Was the Revolution capable of *permanence*?

1968 was a year when ferment in one country encouraged ferment in another. It was an 1848 *with television*. For the first time in human history people could, almost instantaneously, watch revolutionary events in another country. Certainly students copied from each other, success encouraging further success elsewhere. Revolutionary events are not simply the result of 'material conditions'. The mind must also be prepared, and the mind is not simply a blotter soaking up objective input. There is in any revolutionary period a mood, a mind-set, a spirit of idealism, a sense of selflessness; yes, call it the *eros* effect. Such a mood existed in 1968 and all of us who were there will never forget it.

Yet 1968 was not only a year of worldwide student rebellion. It began with the Tet Offensive, during which the National Liberation Front (NLF) heroically rose up throughout South Vietnam, shaking the

---

<sup>11</sup> Katsiaficas, op cit, pp. 6-9.

American-supported regime to its foundations. The Vietnamese movement was not a student rebellion, nor was it an expression of *eros* as Katsiaficas defines it. It was a movement of national liberation made up primarily of peasants and led by a tightly disciplined Communist cadre aligned with the Soviet Union. The Vietnamese Revolution was ultimately successful in establishing Vietnam as an independent state. Yet this state is highly centralized and bureaucratically ruled. *Eros* has a way to go in Vietnam these days.

Nor does the Prague Spring fit neatly into Katsiaficas's global vision. While students were part of the liberalization movement, they did not dominate that development. The Prague Spring was defeated militarily by the Soviet invasion, yet its impact was decisive in breaking the hold of the Soviet Union and its allies over the minds of millions of workers and left intellectuals. The Czech events were primarily the result of the internal dynamic of state socialist society, rather than being a result of international ferment. Like the Tet Offensive, Czechoslovakia's relationship to the global pressures in 1968 was more that of influencer than influenced.

It is clear that the world is different today because of the combined impact of the Vietnamese victory, the Prague Spring (despite—and to some extent because of—its bloody suppression), and the student movements. The New Left gave birth to the feminist movement, which in turn began a process of widespread change in the relations between men and women. The gay movement learned from the New Left and the feminist movement. The civil rights movement, as we have noted, broke down the caste system in the South, and gave Blacks far greater political power within the United States than they had ever possessed. There exist now in the United States organizations devoted to peace, and to diverse ecological and political concerns, which trace their origins to the sixties ferment and are staffed and supported largely by the sixties generation. It may even be that the red and black diapered babies of sixties-generation parents will have an even more profound influence than did the red diaper babies of the thirties generation.

Yet the movements of 1968 were a *failure* when judged in terms of their own goals. Since the *telos* was so intimately wrapped up in the *praxis* of the movements themselves, this is simply another way of stating the obvious fact that the 1960s movements disappeared after 1968 almost as quickly as they had risen up before 1968. This was partly due to the nature of students themselves. Katsiaficas supports the view, widely held in 1968, that the students represented, to use Gorz's term, a New Working Class which would play a dominant role in post-industrial society, replacing that of the old working class in basic industry. This New Working Class has proved to be a relatively privileged layer of society. While the growth of the student population in all countries contributed to the dynamic of the student movement, there is little evidence that this student movement was a *class-for-itself*. I would suggest that this is just as well. I believe students were acting primarily out of concern for other, more needy, strata of society.

American students had a direct interest in opposing a war that could

mean their own death in a faraway jungle. Yet they opposed the war just as fervently when given draft exemptions. They were equally stirred by the issue of civil rights. European students took up the Vietnam war as their cause even though they faced no threat of personal involvement. Yet the class nature of the student can have its impact *over a period of time*. Student struggles tend to be ephemeral, 'for the duration', difficult to sustain over the long haul. This is because many students, at some point, begin to think of their future careers and in this fashion *being can determine consciousness*.

It would seem that during periods of revolutionary upheaval, when students embrace emancipatory thinking, two considerations become important. The first is the need for the student (or indeed the adult intellectual) to reach sectors of society whose material conditions will benefit from emancipation. There is a legitimacy, which Katsiaficas ignores, in classical Marxism's concern with the worker. I am not proposing some kind of narrow workerism, as became popular in the American left after the demise of SDS. I am just suggesting that no matter how broadly alliances and 'rainbows' are constructed, ultimately a movement for social change must involve in a mass way those who benefit personally from such change.

My second consideration concerns the fact that a revolution can never be permanent.<sup>12</sup> It is a *moment* in history when emancipatory thinking becomes part of the life of millions. Permanence requires that the concepts of the moment take on structure, or institutional form. Such structures have to be capable of surviving a return to normalcy and the preoccupations of average citizens with their private affairs. We have seen all too many examples of the abandonment of the revolutionary notion because of the character of the resultant institutional form.

Is Katsiaficas's political *eros* capable of post-revolutionary survival? I do not believe so, because Katsiaficas seeks to perpetuate a human consciousness and relationship which *by its nature* is momentary. It requires a mass consciousness which is not sustainable—not now, not in our times, not in the foreseeable future. Most people are unable and unwilling to attend fifteen-hour meetings which strive to arrive at consensus. We live in highly integrated economies with concentrated population centres, and this places limits on the feasibility of decentralization and requires representative mechanisms for democratic decision-making.<sup>13</sup> Is it possible, in the revolutionary rush, to promote a more prosaic vision which combines a socialist mixed economy with pluralistic representative democracy; a vision capable of institutionalization? Or must we go for the revolutionary high only to crash to an authoritarian low?

---

<sup>12</sup> Trotsky's use of the term 'permanent revolution', derived from Marx, was never intended to suggest that a revolutionary process could be never-ending. It meant only that within a third world country, a revolution which begins with limited democratic and national goals needs to go over to socialist ones in order to fulfil its original purposes.

<sup>13</sup> These points are developed in detail in 'Transition to the Transition', op cit

*comment*

Michael Barratt Brown

## Commercial and Industrial Capital in England: A Reply to Geoffrey Ingham

In response to Perry Anderson's 'Figures of Descent' (NLR 161), I attempted in my contribution (NLR 167), as part of a more general critique, to defend the traditional Marxist view of British capitalism and the British Empire as being rooted in industrial and not in commercial capital accumulation. Geoffrey Ingham complains (NLR 172) of my polemical tone, of the ire he says I reserve for him and of the 'caricature' of his work that I have set up in order to knock it down. I sincerely regret the tone, especially since it has encouraged Ingham to reply in kind. These are important matters that should be the subject of calm and scholarly deliberation. My irritation was aroused, I am afraid, as I noted in my article, by Ingham's persistent reference in his book, *Capitalism Divided?* to 'traditional Marxist theory', 'theoretical Marxists', 'orthodox Marxists', 'cruder Marxist theories', etc., from which he wishes to distance himself, without distinguishing the different writers to whom he is referring or giving us chapter and verse. As a result we cannot reply rigorously, but only with a broad brush.

In his response Ingham has most notably thrown his cloak over Anderson's interpretation of the lessons of *Capitalism Divided?*, but it was Anderson who created the 'caricature', which seemed to me to need challenging, in particular in his description of British capitalists as chiefly 'commercial intermediaries'. It does still seem to me that some of Ingham's argument lays itself open to misinterpretation. His emphasis on the continuing dominant role of the City, even in a 'capitalism divided', and on commercial activity in the expansion of empire does lend itself to what I believe to be a serious underplaying of the basic role of accumulation from productive capital in British capitalism and in British imperialism.

I am happy to recognize the justice of Ingham's complaint when he writes (p. 63): 'Barratt Brown argues as if any concession to my notions about Empire and the City's commercial capitalism necessarily involves a criticism of the traditional view. But this is not so, the respective approaches are not logically exclusive. It is, rather, the



factual basis of the traditional view which is so difficult to uphold.' I believe that this is not so difficult; and, since Ingham accuses me not only of 'conceptual confusion' of Marxist theory and of ignorance of recent scholarship, but also of misrepresentation, I am bound to seek to defend myself and particularly my definitions of commercial and industrial capital.

The first example Ingham gives of misinterpretation is that I falsely accuse him of including brewing together with commercial activities. The facts are (a) that Anderson quite specifically does so on page 340f NLR 161; and (b) that Ingham does so on page 138 of *Capitalism Divided?* when he contrasts the patronage given by Liberals to industrialists with Conservative generosity to 'bankers, ship owners, merchants and brewers'. But the heart of his argument is that I 'obscure one of Marx's most enduring achievements' in 'misunderstanding the theoretical treatment of commerce in *Capitalism Divided?*' (p. 48). It is Marx's own analysis of the forms and circuits of capital on which Ingham says that he based his discussion, while I, for example in my inclusion of shipping in the profits of productive capital, have simply taken a 'common sense standpoint'. To establish that Marx thought otherwise, he quotes from Marx's distinction in Chapter 5 of Volume One of *Capital* between the 'primary form of capital, the form in which it determines the economic organization of modern society and ... so to speak antediluvian forms of merchants' capital and usurers' capital'. But he only quotes Marx's insistence that 'circulation or the exchange of commodities creates no value', and not the complete 'antediluvian' reference. (Incidentally, for the benefit of those who wish to follow up the reference, it occurs on page 266 of the Penguin edition, and not as cited by Ingham on page 331.) In this passage Marx says nothing about the carrying trade being part of circulation and therefore, like other commercial activity, creating no value. When, in Volume Two of *Capital*, Marx does go into detail about the costs of circulation, he devotes a special section to 'Transport Costs' (pages 225-228 of the Penguin edition), in order to insist that 'the productive capital invested in this industry [i.e. transport—MBB] thus adds value to the products transported, partly through the value carried over from the means of transport, partly through the value added by the work of transport. The latter addition of value can be divided, as with all capitalist production, into replacement of wages and surplus value.' This is, of course, also the common sense view of all those who have ever been involved in commodity dealing, as Marx explains. Transporting commodities from their source to the market is as much a part of the production process as their extraction from the earth, and the surplus value which the merchant gets his fingers on is created as much for example in the transporting of coal to the coal merchant as it is in transporting it to the surface. Otherwise, only the most direct labour of coal cutting, weaving, planting or harvesting could be regarded as productive labour.

### Overseas Investment

My case for including most of overseas investment in productive capital and not in commerce is that most of it involved and still involves

extraction of surplus value from productive labour. I did not claim that nearly all overseas investment involved and still involves productive capital, but Ingham does claim that nearly all of it was and is commercial. In his reworking of Imlah's data, he puts all income from overseas investment under the heading of Banking/Finance. He criticizes my list of productive investments on two grounds: first, he says that when I include sugar and cotton plantations as well as tea and rubber estates, I am guilty of 'conflation of the plantation slavery of the old colonial system with the imperial activities of the late Nineteenth Century.' Were there no sugar and cotton plantations in the late nineteenth century? Secondly he answers my inclusion of mills and factories by arguing that in 1913 only five per cent of Britain's overseas investment was in manufacturing industry. He completely leaves out from my list in quoting from it: 'gold, silver, copper and tin mines, Lever Brothers, oil companies, the Chartered company, Dalgety, railways and other utilities.' The Chatham House study of British overseas investment in 1913 included 41 per cent in railways, 20 per cent in mines, 5 per cent in public utilities, and shipping and 3 per cent in other raw materials. These, together with the 5 per cent in manufacturing, make up a total of 64 per cent of investment in productive industry.

We can now re-examine Ingham's revamping of the Imlah data and make allowances for any subsequent downward revisions of the overseas investment figures. If we take the 64 per cent of investment income out of the column of Banking/Finance and add Shipping earnings together with earnings from the Export of Goods, then the proportion of overseas income derived from productive capital comes to 76 per cent of the total, and not, as Ingham avers, some 50:50 with income from commerce and finance. Moreover, the growth of productive capital in the nineteenth century can be seen to be as rapid as that of commercial capital, which is what both Ingham and Anderson specifically deny. Even if we take account of the fact that some of the investment in production only came *through* London to overseas territories, this was certainly equally true of commercial investment.

Most of Ingham's other arguments with my article are predicated on the assumption that, in my view, the City is not 'primarily the centre of commercial capital' (p. 46). My case is quite different: it is that British capitalism is not, and never was, primarily involved in commercial activity. In *Capitalism Divided?* Ingham made an extremely important point about the commercial, merchanting function of the City being distinct from its financial function—i.e. dealing in commodities including money rather than lending, and hence being paid in fees and commissions as much as in dividends and interest—and if I had been reviewing his book and not Anderson's article I should have made much of this. But the question at issue is not the place of different functions in the City; it is the role of the City in British capitalism. I have shown, I hope, that Ingham exaggerates the place of commercial capital in the overseas balance. I believe he has encouraged Anderson to exaggerate the continuous decline of British industry. He derides my suggestion that 'British productivity held up remarkably well until the First World War'. While I recognized faster

growth in the USA and Germany (NLR 172, p. 59) I gave the figures for industrial productivity in the UK in order to correct Anderson's exaggerated statements about an absolute decline (NLR 162, p. 27).

My argument was that there had been many discontinuities in the history of British capitalism, ups and downs and twists and turns, which cannot rightly be evened out under one great arch. Ingham allows that in the 1930s the 'Empire was put to the kind of uses which Barratt Brown argues were the primary motives in the late Nineteenth Century' (p. 62) and that in World War Two 'the treasury temporarily lost power . . . in order that a national productive economy could be organized' (p. 58). Ingham says that in drawing attention to these examples of what he calls 'the brief ascendancy' of industrial capital I am displaying 'a systematic misunderstanding'! But what about 'Experiments in State Control' in the First World War (the title of a book by E.M.H. Lloyd—a Treasury official) and the near success of Joseph Chamberlain's Tariff Reform Campaign and of George Brown's 1965 National Plan and what about British industry's preparations today for the Single Market—all misunderstood? Or were they not all conscious or unconscious attempts to maintain the strength of a British capitalism, which the Treasury was obstructing?

I am happy to accept the implication of the title of Ingham's book, *Capitalism Divided?* Indeed, the conclusion of my article was that Anderson and Leys, building on Ingham's thesis, had sought to establish a hegemonic role for the City-Bank-Treasury nexus, when 'the reality is one of a deeply divided ruling class' (p. 49). But when Ingham accuses me of 'hasty and ill-considered conclusions' (p. 64) in recognizing a new twist in the latest explosion of speculation in the City, he seems to me to be spoiling his case. I saw this as part of a world-wide speculative capitalist boom which was bound to burst (I was writing before October 1987), in relation to Anderson's conclusion: 'Under Thatcher the City has boomed as never before; but never so much as an enclave rather than an engine of British capitalism as a whole' (pp. 69–70). Ingham's comment on my amusement at the great City-Bank-Treasury nexus ending up as an enclave, is that 'the City has always been a foreign enclave to some degree' (p. 65). But are we talking about a place or what Anderson calls a 'complex of British capital' (p. 69)? A place cannot have a hegemonic role, but a complex of national capital can, consciously or unconsciously exercised.

Ingham accuses me of 'uncompromising materialism' in confusing functional links and causal connections. But, I find the concept of a hegemonic City-Bank-Treasury nexus much more like a conscious conspiracy, even, as in Ingham's conceptualization, a nexus of conspiracies, than my concept of owners of capital being driven by the dictates of accumulation to find surplus value, sometimes at home, sometimes abroad, and only rarely perhaps in any conscious sense coming together to make plans for the British economy as a whole. This does not mean that I exclude the possibility of individual groupings of capital—from finance and industry—working together to coordinate their activities. Ingham calls this possibility 'wild but also mistaken speculation' (p. 61). What then are the merchant bankers

doing now in the process of rationalization of industry in anticipation of the Single European Market in 1992? Partly, there has been an element of speculation, as not only the stock exchange, but all the other money markets behave more and more like the casino that Keynes, and not Susan Strange, first dubbed them. Beneath the speculation there does appear to be a clear indication of the linkages between finance and industry in Britain which I affirm and Ingham denies.

Let us just consider the latest figures in *Economic Trends*. In the two decades up to 1984, British industry relied mainly on internally generated funds, but the annual value of net borrowing averaged a third of those funds (not 11 per cent as Ingham states). In the last five years the net borrowing by companies has risen to equal the funds generated internally; and all this extra borrowing is financing investment in UK companies at home and investment abroad, so that these two items have come to equal a half instead of a fifth of their own capital formation. Of course some of these companies are commercial, not all are industrial, but the implication of a much closer connection of finance and industry in Britain, when the competitive pressure of European and world markets is on, seems inescapable.

To pursue any further the many criticisms which Ingham makes of my response to Anderson would be to tire my readers beyond endurance. Those who are interested in the original debate between myself and Perry, which Ingham's contribution has greatly enlivened, may care to look at a paper I prepared for delivery in March 1989 at a seminar at the Centre of Social Theory at UCLA.

## Collets

### The Book People of the Left

#### COLLETS INTERNATIONAL SHOP

129-131 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0EQ  
Telephone: [01] 734 0782/3

The very best of general books, especially British & foreign fiction. The broadest spectrum of books, journals & pamphlets on all aspects of politics, economics, social science & the labour and trade union movement. Russian & Slavonic literature, teaching & learning aids. Travel & guide-books from & about the USSR & Eastern Europe. Art books from the USSR. EFL & Open University textbooks. Third world, gay & feminist politics; ecology & peace publications. Classical records & sheet music from the USSR. Folk music dept. & songbooks. Political posters & badges.

#### COLLETS PENGUIN BOOKSHOP

64-66 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0BD. Tel: [01] 836 6303  
Most Penguins, Pelicans & Puffins in print. Secondhand science section. Reference, travel, & cookery books. The best of modern fiction.

#### COLLETS CHINESE BOOKSHOP & GALLERY

40 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PJ  
Tel: [01] 580 7538

Books in Chinese & English from & about China. Chinese language aids & oriental art books. Traditional Chinese handicrafts & works of art; antiques, prints, jewellery, porcelain and embroideries. Chinese artists' materials.

MAIL ORDERS WELCOME

# 79 *new left review*

## BERLIN, PRAGUE, MOSCOW

Alexander Medvedev	Soviet Power Today
W. Davies	Gorbachev's Socialism
Giovanni Arrighi	Marxism and Its History
Udo Uhl	A Wider Freedom
Wolfgang Reich	Germany's Futures
John Keane	The Polish Laboratory
John Jessop et al.	The Thatcher Balance-Sheet

£ 3.50

\$6.50

ISSN 0022-3193

0022-3193

1		<i>Themes</i>
5	<i>R. W. Davies</i>	Gorbachev's Socialism in Historical Perspective
29	<i>Gianni Arrighi</i>	Marxist Century, American Century: The Making and Remaking of the World Labour Movement
65	<i>Zhores Medvedev</i>	INTERVIEW Soviet Power Today
81	<i>Bob Jessop/Kevin Bonnett/ Simon Bromley</i>	Farewell to Thatcherism? Neo-Liberalism and 'New Times'
103	<i>John Keane</i>	The Polish Laboratory
111	<i>Petr Uhl</i>	INTERVIEW The Fight for a Socialist Democracy in Czechoslovakia
120	<i>Jens Reich</i>	Germany – a Binary Poison
125	<i>Mary Evans</i>	COMMENT A Comment on Nicky Hart

<i>Editor</i>	Robin Blackburn
<i>Editorial Committee</i>	Tariq Ali, Patrick Camiller, Alexander Cockburn, Mike Davis, Peter Dews, Deane Elson, Norman Geras, Quintin Hoare, Oliver MacDonald, Branka Magat, Ellen Meiksins Wood
<i>Associate Editor</i>	Perry Anderson

<i>Editorial communications</i>	New Left Review, 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR
<i>Subscription correspondence</i>	New Left Review, 120-126 Lavender Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HP
<i>Business Manager</i>	Robin Gable
<i>Advertising Manager</i>	Arthur Boyars
<i>American Distributor</i>	B. de Boer, 113 East Center Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA

<i>NLR Prices</i>	<i>Individual subscription:</i>	<i>Institutional subscription:</i>
<i>Inland (UK/Euro):</i>	£17	£33
<i>Europe (air) &amp; Rest of World (ASP):</i>	£21 or US\$33	£37 or US\$58
<i>USA &amp; Canada (Airmail):</i>	£21 or US\$33 or Can\$40	£37 or US\$58
<i>Airmail overseas:</i>	£29 or US\$45 or Can\$55	£45 or US\$70

MICROFICHE SETS 1-178 (1960-1989), incl. cum. index. £350 (inland), £365/US\$600 (overseas)

INDEX 1-178 (1960-1989). *Inland* £28 (cloth), £13 (paper) *Overseas* £31/US\$50 (cloth), £15/US\$24 (paper)

*New Left Review* (ISSN 0028-6060) is published bi-monthly by New Left Review Ltd, 6 Meard St., London W1V 3HR, UK. Annual subscription price in the USA and Canada is US\$33 for individuals, US\$58 for institutions, including airspeed delivery. Second-class postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. USA POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to New Left Review, Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Printed in Great Britain.

The toppling of Ceausescu in December represented a further dramatic advance for that wave of people power in Eastern Europe which we saluted in NLR 178. Several articles in this issue of the Review explore the character and meaning of the events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Two veteran oppositionists—Peter Uhl in Czechoslovakia and Adam Michnik in Poland—give contrasting assessments of the problems of the post-Communist order. We also publish a reflection on the German question by Jens Reich, a founder of Neues Forum. While there is now every prospect that East Germans will opt for a Confederation with the West it is also clear that most do not see this in terms of a simple annexation for the benefit of Western capitalists. In our last issue we expressed the hope that some social guarantees could be salvaged from the wreckage of Stalinism but the conjuncture which looms is not a hopeful one. Economic dislocation in the East threatens drastic cuts in living standards while the capitalist West dishes out paltry credits only in return for promises that the post-Communist states will become a free-fire zone for a new species of booty capitalism. As one section of the nomenklatura privatizes public assets; another advises the new authorities on how to implement the austerity policy demanded by the international financial community. These are not propitious conditions for the construction of democracy. However it is still early days. Elections in the East and the dawning realization that the Left and the labour movements in the West have new responsibilities could open the way to an alliance between those social and political forces, in each region, prepared to organize against that 'anarcho-capitalism' which Patrick Camiller pinpointed as the main danger in his article on socialist perspectives in contemporary Europe in NLR 175. Western labour movements have a strong interest in preventing the construction of a third-rate capitalism in the East which would be used to undercut the social conquests and economic conditions of working people in the West. What will be needed are new transnational forms of solidarity and far more generous perspectives of economic and social reconstruction than any so far proposed. These are questions to which we will be returning in future issues.

While the outlook for the Soviet Union could scarcely be more ominous,

there is now some reason to believe that its half-reformed political structures could prove capable of at least learning from their mistakes—one of the few commodities of which there is currently no shortage. Gorbachev must be given great credit for tolerating—in some cases more or less instigating—the settling of accounts with the Bourbons of Eastern Europe. Yet in the Soviet Union itself the Politburo and Central Committee have been indulgent to bureaucratic privilege and obstruction, credulous towards ‘free market’ technocrats, unimaginative in devising alternative socio-economic forms and, most dangerous of all, crudely bullying towards the national movements which challenge the central power. The decision to send troops into Baku and to do so in the name of sacred borders—‘the holy of holies’ so the communiqué had it—rather than simply to forestall communalist violence, has massively alienated Azerbaijani sentiment and put at risk all the historic reforms which have been so loudly proclaimed. The one positive gain—for which again Gorbachev must be given credit—has been the emergence of new parliamentary structures and of some forms of a democratic awakening of extra-parliamentary life—from a freer press to workers’ strikes. The emergence of democratic practices at least offers the possibility of a learning curve and of self-correction. But democracy cannot be achieved in the Soviet Union, anymore than anywhere else, by trampling on national aspirations to self-government. The national question has a formidable complexity in the Soviet Union which makes the application of democratic principles both the more necessary and the more difficult. The authorities in Moscow can insist on safeguards for minorities, and can offer economic assistance and military protection, but they will have to accept a unilateral right of secession and be willing to negotiate with the real leaders of the various national movements which have sprung up in the Baltic and the Caucasus. Soviet intellectual and political life would undoubtedly be healthier if Lenin’s legacy could be debated in a properly critical spirit, but his insistence that the right of national self-determination should always be respected remains unsurpassed counsel, and counsel which is in no way invalidated by his own lapse in countenancing the invasion of Georgia.

In this issue of the Review Zhores Medvedev, following his return to the Soviet Union for the first time in seventeen years, gives an account of the work of the Supreme Soviet and of its relationship to a burgeoning new public opinion. But he also etches a sombre picture of the extent of the Soviet crisis and of the many afflictions brought on by prolonged economic failure and social demoralization, from a soaring crime rate to aggravated ethnic animosities. The systemic dimensions of the Soviet



crisis are further illuminated by R.W. Davies's searching and informative discussion of successive attempts to devise or reform the centralized model of a command economy. Davies's incisive analysis spares neither official capitulations nor *bien pensant* nostrums.

Giovanni Arrighi addresses the present crisis of what he terms 'historic Marxism' by drawing on the resources of historical materialism itself. He charts the subsequent history of capitalism and anti-capitalism against the underlying theses adumbrated by Marx and Engels in 'The Communist Manifesto'. He argues that the original Marxist expectation was that social misery and social power would coincide in the proletariat, and that there would be a natural harmony between the growing power of labour and the goal of constructing a socialist society on the ruins of capitalism. In a bold periodization of subsequent historical developments Arrighi traces the twentieth-century divergence from these classical assumptions—most particularly the growing divorce between the trade unionism and gradualism of the working class in the Anglo-Saxon world and Scandinavia, on the one hand, and the consolidation of a Leninist 'historical Marxism' claiming legitimacy from the wretched of the earth, on the other. But in an ironic twist it was Communism—'historical Marxism'—rather than late capitalism which first gave birth to its grave digger—an increasingly cultured and assertive proletariat. Arrighi considers the present period as bringing to an end the long schism between competing conceptions of the proletariat since an increasingly heterogeneous working class faces comparable problems in both major zones. This powerful essay undoubtedly sets crucial terms for the debate on the meaning of the century while avoiding the facile sophisms of *mal de siècle*.

Some experts in the East, as Davies reminds us, look longingly on the supposed achievements of the 'Thatcher miracle'. In reality Margaret Thatcher's administration found no better use for the windfall profits of North Sea oil than to take the national economy through a grander stop-go switch-back than had been possible for her predecessors. In this issue of the Review Bob Jessop and his co-authors dissect the economic debacle of Thatcherism today, with a yawning balance of payments deficit, soaring interest rates, starved social services and vicious social divisions.

# *new left review* EDITIONS

*A Bookclub for Subscribers to New Left Review*  
**Essential Reading for a New Europe**

## **CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE**

### **New European Perspectives**

Edited by John Keane

Contributors include **Norberto Bobbio, Agnes Heller, Claus Offe, Alberto Melucci, Mihaly Vajda and Vaclav Havel**

**'a unique creative synthesis of two traditions'**

*Bernard Crick, New Society*

**'the most massive attempt to date to re-evaluate all traditional values of the left'**

*Zygmunt Bauman, New Statesman*

430 pages    Retail Price £12.95 paperback    **BOOKCLUB PRICE £10.55 paperback**

## **EXIT**

### **A Romanian Story**

Richard Wagner

Translated by Quintin Hoare

**'Every sentence drives a nail into your brain'**

*Frankfurter Rundschau*

The repressive and surreal world of Ceausescu's Romania provides the setting and subject of an extraordinary first novel from this Romanian author. Includes an introduction essay on the recent revolutionary events in the country.

150 pages    Retail price £7.95 paperback    **BOOKCLUB PRICE £6.35 paperback**

## **THE NEW DETENTE**

### **Rethinking East-West Relations**

Edited by Mary Kaldor, Richard Falk and Gerard Holden

Contributors include **Boris Kagarlitsky, Mary Kaldor, Adam Michnik,**

**Kate Soper, Milan Simecka and Hilary Wainwright**

Representatives of new social movements from Eastern and Western Europe discuss the underlying social, economic and political conditions for a new detente.

430 pages    Retail price £12.95 paperback    **BOOKCLUB PRICE £10.55 paperback**



**VERSO**

Orders with payment payable to Verso (plus £1 postage per book) to  
Verso, 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR. Tel: 01-437 3548

## Gorbachev's Socialism in Historical Perspective

Perhaps one, or several, of the present or future leaders of Soviet communism may develop the will, the courage and the political ability eventually to break through the tangle of obstacles, to revitalize the forces of liberty without stimulating them to the point where they would exhaust themselves in an attempt at revolution, and to keep the reform in domestic and foreign policy in a dynamic equilibrium without a breakdown on either side. The ultimate goal of such a course would be the return not only to Lenin but to the old socialist tradition.

Carl Landauer, *European Socialism* (1959)

During the tumultuous months of 1989 the Western view that world communism is in a profound crisis seems to have been dramatically confirmed.<sup>1</sup> All Eastern Europe has moved sharply towards a multi-party system in which the Communist Party is likely to be in a minority; and the Hungarian and Polish economies are rapidly acquiring a substantial capitalist sector. In China the dominant group in the Communist Party has suppressed the democratic movement by crude force. Socialism outside the Communist world has also been in something of a crisis since the 1970s. In 1939 and even in 1965 it seemed probable—at least to most socialists—that socialism would

become the dominant world system, in either its communist or its democratic socialist form, or through some kind of convergence between capitalism and socialism. But by the late 1980s most of the industrialized capitalist countries had emerged from economic crisis technologically more advanced and economically more powerful; throughout the industrialized world, which now includes former third-world countries such as Taiwan and South Korea, socialism seemed to be on the retreat.

This bleak view of the prospects for communism and democratic socialism may be a superficial extrapolation from the trends of the past two decades. It was only after many centuries of turmoil, through a long process of advances and retreats, that capitalism established itself as the dominant world economic system. Perhaps in the longer perspective of the next century or two, the 1970s and 1980s may seem to be merely a period of temporary retreat in the rise of socialism. Perhaps in this perspective Soviet developments since the 1920s (or since 1917?) may seem to be a disastrous if educative false start.

It seems to me that many of the traditional socialist arguments against private capitalism remain as powerful in 1990 as they were a century ago. There is a strong practical and moral case for some kind of socialist world order. Most of the advanced countries continue to be class-divided societies with extreme inequalities of wealth and power. The rest of the world remains impoverished, and now also bears the burden of a crippling debt to the advanced capitalist countries. Moreover, industrialization has brought with it grave ecological problems on a world scale. Can these problems be solved, and the world economy prosper, without some kind of national and international planning and regulation of the activities of supra-national companies?

It is in this context of uncertainty about the future of human society, acute and obvious in the Communist world, but also chronic in the non-Communist world, that we should think about the grand programme of political and economic reform launched by Gorbachev and his colleagues. Soviet 'new thinking' since 1985, at first vague and hesitant, has involved a startling transformation of ideas, in internal as well as in international affairs. So far the economy has in practice remained largely unreformed, and the first steps towards reform have plunged the economy into a deeper crisis. But some elements of a new model of socialism have emerged which in major aspects contradicts not only the traditional Soviet model but also the visions of the socialist future depicted by Lenin and even by Marx. The present article explores this new Soviet approach in the context both of the history of socialist thought and of the traditional Soviet model.

---

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary versions of this paper were presented at a conference in the University of Hokkaido in July 1989 and at the annual conference of CRRS, University of Birmingham, in June 1989. The author is grateful to the participants in these conferences, and particularly to Drs. N. Shiokawa, E. Ambartsoumov, and J. Cooper, and Professor P. Hanson, for their helpful comments. It will be published in *The Social Roots of Stalinism*, edited by Nicholas Lampert and Gabor T. Rittersporn, Macmillan 1990.

## I. Socialism Before 1917

Precursors of modern socialism may be found in Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*, and in the visions of the future of Gerrard Winstanley and the seventeenth-century English Levellers. But the term 'Socialism' was apparently first used by Robert Owen in 1827, and it was in nineteenth-century Europe that Socialism became a popular political creed.

There are many Socialisms. But in the nineteenth century the various models of the future society usually embodied three major principles: common ownership; democratic management; and equality. Views differed sharply on what these principles would mean in practice. For Fourier, Owen and Proudhon the ideal economy consisted of co-operatives or companies owned and managed by those who worked in them; socialism involved producers' democracy. They conceded that the different cooperatives or companies would have to associate with each other in order to meet national needs. But their principal concern was, as William Morris put it, to arrange for the 'unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details' (1889).

Other socialists were much more concerned to ensure that the anarchy of capitalism should be replaced by the integrated management of production and distribution for the social good. One of Saint-Simon's disciples called for 'general forethought', which amounted to a kind of comprehensive planning: 'society must be organized according to general forethought and must continually be guided, as an entity and in all its parts, by such forethought.' Much later in the century Bellamy defended central direction by 'a single syndicate representing the people', and even compared the future economy to a 'disciplined army under one general'. Marx also of course took it for granted that the future socialist or communist economy should be planned comprehensively, and described a rough economy-wide planning system in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875).

In general, those who stressed the need for comprehensive planning tended to favour state ownership. While Marx and Engels believed that the state as a coercive mechanism would wither away during the transition to socialism, they also emphasized that during the transition period it would be necessary to 'centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state' (1848). It is true that Saint-Simon, Marx and Bellamy all firmly believed that socialism would be democratic; Engels referred to 'the free and equal association of the producers'. But it is perhaps fair to say that this wing of the socialist movement tended on the whole not to be worried about the power that would be vested in the controllers of a planned society. Saint-Simon happily envisaged that the economy would be run by the technical elite. Marx clashed with Bakunin, who accused him of failing to realize that workers in power would set themselves above the ordinary workers. According to Bakunin, a socialist state would be 'nothing but a barracks... where regimented working men and women will sleep, work and live to the beat of a drum; where the shrewd and

educated will be granted government privileges'. And William Morris denounced Bellamy's Utopia as 'State Communism, worked by the vast extreme of national centralization'.

On the issue of equality there was little disagreement. All socialists believed that the new order would embody much greater equality than all previous societies, and many advocated complete equality. Marx distinguished between the higher phase of communist society and the lower phase, which he termed socialism. In the higher phase, the product would be distributed according to need; in the lower or socialist phase, there was not yet an abundant supply of goods, and the product was distributed unequally according to work done. But even here the inequalities due to exploitation would already be eliminated. In general, nineteenth-century socialists placed a great deal of emphasis on the more equal redistribution of social wealth as a cardinal merit of socialism.

All these rival views were current in the pre-revolutionary Russian socialist movement. There was a more or less common international appreciation among socialists of the issues—and the unsolved problems—of the future socialist society.<sup>2</sup>

So far I have not mentioned the market. With hardly any exceptions, both the 'cooperative' and the 'planning' wings of socialism assumed that markets would no longer be required in a socialist society. Fourier stressed that his new society would eliminate the commercial machinations of the merchants. Marx held that money would be eliminated under socialism; it would be replaced by labour tokens, which entitled the producers to draw on the common stock in accordance with the work they had contributed. Bellamy had a similar scheme for the distribution of the product. And even at the beginning of the twentieth century Kautsky assumed that, while money would continue, exchange of goods would be replaced by some kind of planned distribution. His contemporary Bernstein, for all his revisionism, assumed that there would be one producers' association for each industry, so that 'the coercive laws of competition' would be eliminated; competition would be suppressed and replaced by monopoly.

Theodor Hertzka's *Freiland* (1886 and 1890) was a rare exception. Here the self-managed firms were held together by the market: 'The price of all the products of work, determined through competition, rules in a quite automatic fashion the in- and outflow of labour forces, always according to the measure of need for the products of the different branches of work.'<sup>3</sup> Hertzka was a precursor of Heimann and the market socialists of the 1920s, who were in turn followed by Lange, Dickinson and others in the 1930s. These market models of socialism

---

<sup>2</sup> On Russian socialist views of the future, see R. Selts, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, London 1989.

<sup>3</sup> On Hertzka and similar thinkers, see A. Chioffi, 'The Right to Employment Principle and Self-Managed Market Socialism', *EUP Working Paper* 86/214 (European University Institute, Florence 1986).

were designed in response to von Mises's famous attempt to demonstrate that administered socialism was unworkable. Some variants of the model assumed that market prices formed by competition would guide the socialist firm; others assumed that the state would fix prices equal to those which would have emerged on a free market. In some models, investment as distinct from production and consumption was determined by the market; in others it was determined by the planners centrally.

Thus the view that the market would continue under socialism did not become widespread in the West until the 1920s. One of the main arguments in favour of socialism was that it would eliminate the waste, chaos and fluctuation with which the capitalist market was always associated. Before the first world war nearly all socialists assumed that this would involve the elimination of the market itself.

## II. The Traditional Soviet Model

The Soviet model of the socialist economy rejected or drastically modified all three major principles of the predominant nineteenth-century vision of socialism: common ownership, democratic management and equality. For Soviet Communists common ownership ultimately meant state ownership. In the brief period of rethinking before his death Lenin spoke of socialism as a 'society of civilized cooperators'. But even during the New Economic Policy the standard Bolshevik assumption was that state ownership was the highest form of common ownership. By the 1930s this assumption had become a dogma. Under communism all ownership would be state ownership, and when the state had withered away this higher form of ownership would simply be renamed 'public ownership' (*obschchenarodnaya sobstvennost'*).

Together with their support for state ownership, Soviet Communists very strongly emphasized the crucial importance of central planning in a socialist economy. Planning was of course particularly essential in Soviet Russia because a semi-industrialized peasant society had to be brought up to the technical and productive level of the industrialized powers. But planning would also be required during the transition from socialism to communism. Planning was the antithesis to the anarchy of the capitalist market.

During the New Economic Policy some economists favoured flexible forms of planning, and until 1928 everyone assumed that plans must be made compatible with market equilibrium, and with a non-coercive economic relationship with the peasantry. But all Communist economists assumed that this was a transitional stage; eventually planning would replace the market, and product-exchange would replace trade. The universal validity of planning seemed to have been clearly demonstrated when the whole capitalist world plunged into economic crisis and mass unemployment on an unprecedented scale in 1929-31.

This stress on the importance of planning was accompanied by the virtual elimination of self-management or producers' democracy from the Bolshevik programme. The story is complicated. As early as the

spring of 1918, Lenin insisted that 'one-person management' in industry and elsewhere must replace committee management; and that managers must be appointed rather than elected. In 1920 this view was enforced in industry against the opposition of the trade unions and the party members then responsible for the general administration of state industry, and in 1921 it was finally enshrined in party doctrine with the defeat of the Workers' Opposition. Lenin argued that one-man management was essential for efficiency; the Soviet proletariat had to learn from the capitalist trusts. In the ensuing decades, limited schemes for self-management and the election of foremen and managers occasionally re-emerged, particularly during the first five-year plan. But self-management virtually disappeared from Soviet socialism between 1921 and 1970.

The Soviet model exercised considerable influence on West European socialism, which was in any case already inclined by the 1930s and 1940s to a state-oriented or bureaucratic concept of socialism. In Britain after the Second World War, the Labour government assumed that socialization meant nationalization, and the trade unions agreed with the view of the politicians that nationalized industries should be run by appointed managers rather than by a board elected by the workers.

Until 1931 the third principle of nineteenth-century socialism—redistribution in the interests of greater equality—continued to be upheld in the Soviet Union, both in doctrine and in practice. The party and the trade unions acknowledged that during the transition to socialism it was necessary to retain some differentiation of wages in accordance with skill, and with the intensity and difficulty of work. But even in the course of the 1920s wage differentials between and within industries were slowly narrowed. It should be noted, however, that this greater equalization did not apply to the emerging ruling elite: their material privileges more or less steadily increased from 1918 onwards. Party members were subject to a maximum wage (the *partmaksimum*); but leading party officials had access to special housing, medical and recreational facilities. The great public break with the socialist egalitarian tradition came in June 1931, when Stalin in his address to business managers condemned petty-bourgeois egalitarianism, and insisted that greater differentiation of income was essential to the efficient construction of a socialist society. The *partmaksimum* was abolished in the following year.

We noted earlier that the post-revolutionary Soviet Communists, like the pre-war socialists, assumed that the market would be eliminated with the establishment of socialism. But this view was modified considerably, both during the New Economic Policy and in the Stalin period. During NEP in the 1920s, it was assumed that the market economy would continue throughout the transition to socialism, and many leading party members took it for granted that the transition would take several decades. With the 'great break-through' of 1929, the end of the market seemed at last to be in sight; and the next few years saw the establishment of a centrally planned or administrative-command economy. By 1934, however, the administrative-command model of socialism had been significantly modified.



In several important respects the economic system established under Stalin was not the moneyless product-exchange economy envisaged in 1930. First, most collective-farm and state-farm peasant households ✓ worked their own personal plot, and could own their own cow and poultry. After obligations to the state had been met, both the household and the collective farm to which it belonged were permitted to sell their produce on the 'collective-farm market'—in effect, a free p market in which prices were regulated by supply and demand. Secondly, outside the large forced-labour sector, with certain restrictions employees of the state were free to change their job. A very imperfect market for labour existed throughout the Stalin period and after; wages and other material inducements played an important role in persuading people to work in priority sectors. These arrangements ✓ are in sharp contrast to the Chinese economic system, where even today the rights of workers in the state sector to change their jobs are very limited. Thirdly, from the end of 1934 the rationing of food and consumer goods in state and cooperative retail trade was abolished (it ✓ was resumed during the Second World War until 1947, and on a local basis in the 1970s). Consumers were able to choose among such products as were available. This was, however, a very limited 'market', because prices were fixed by the state. Fourthly, various ✓ forms of illegal 'second' or black-market economy formed an inherent part of the system.

The Soviet model of socialism introduced in the 1930s was certainly an administrative-command economy managed from the centre; and this model has remained in force until now. But it made significant ✓ though limited concessions to the operation of market forces.

### III. Towards a New Model of Soviet Socialism

The crucial feature of Gorbachev's reforms, which has astonished almost every Western student of Soviet affairs, is the twin emphasis on democratic and economic reforms. Until the spring of 1989, ✓ Chinese economists argued that political democratization was not ✓ crucial for economic reform. Other economists have even insisted that the democratic rights of workers and other citizens should be positively discouraged; they stood in the way of economic efficiency in pre-Thatcher Britain and their absence was an important factor in the progress of such countries as South Korea. But after the Chinese political crisis of spring 1989, Gorbachev's call for socialist ✓ democracy seems wise as well as more humane.

#### The Role of the Bureaucracy

All Soviet reformers, moderate and radical, left-wing and right-wing, ✓ strongly believe that the centralized bureaucratic political and administrative structure is a major conservative force and a major obstacle to reform. But what is the social nature of the Soviet system created in ✓ the Stalin era and continued by Brezhnev, the system which Gorbachev termed 'the administrative-command system for the party-state management of the country'?

The predominant official view is that Soviet development in the 1930s and 1940s, in spite of the inhumanities and social defects, represented a move towards socialism. Thus Academician G. Smirnov, director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, argued that Soviet society was a form of socialism: the masses were 'striving' for socialism, and there were no exploiting classes. He acknowledged, however, that the system might be described as 'early socialism', 'barracks socialism', 'state socialism' or 'deformed socialism'.<sup>4</sup>

Other leading figures go much further, and argue that the bureaucracy, at least until 1985, had usurped political power as a social group, or was even an exploiting ruling class.<sup>5</sup> In 1988-89 this view gained increasing support. It is significant that Academician Zaslavskaya, who in the past described Soviet society in terms of a complex inter-relation of groups, in December 1988 declared that the 'nomenclature stratum' was well on the way to being a class.<sup>6</sup>

Gorbachev and his advisers have not taken a firm line on this question. On numerous occasions Gorbachev has attacked the crippling conservatism of bureaucrats, and made it clear that this is a widespread social phenomenon. Thus at the party central committee plenum in October 1987 he recounted with approval a detective story in which a party cell had justifiably wanted to dismiss an official, but 'the whole "nomenklatura" from top to bottom came to the defence of this "nomenklaturshchik"'.<sup>7</sup> And in October 1988, at a central committee conference on agriculture, Gorbachev's approval for sweeping attacks on the bureaucracy was made clear by his intervention in a delegate's speech:

[V. I. Guseinov] Specialists and leaders from the farm to the Ministry are a special kind of cog (*zastuk*) in the administrative-economic apparatus, are the conservatives in *perestroika*.

✓ [M. S. Gorbachev] They aren't cogs, but big bolts.<sup>8</sup>

In the course of the past two or three years, privileges afforded to high officials in the form of special shops, medical services and housing have been confronted by a rising tide of public hostility. They were a major issue in the elections of March 1989, and played a significant role in the defeat of many party officials. This general hostility to privileges was at first resisted by the Politburo, but recently ✓ Gorbachev and his supporters have been much more receptive to it. They have been pushed in this direction both by public opinion and by the bitter resistance of many conservative officials to political and economic reform, which has more and more turned the struggle for reform into a struggle against the whole bureaucracy. At the Congress of Soviets in June 1989 Gorbachev proposed that a Commission of the Supreme Soviet should be set up 'to carry out a kind of general

<sup>4</sup> *Politicheskoe obrazovanie* I, 1989, 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> For the debate among historians on this question, see my *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution*, London 1989, ch 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Izvestiya*, 24 December 1988.

<sup>7</sup> This speech was first published in *Izvestiya TSK*, no. 2, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> *Pravda*, 14 October 1988.

inspection ("reviziya") of all concessions and privileges', and Prime Minister Ryzhkov added teeth to this idea:

In this connection [he reported] the leadership of the country makes the proposal that, on the basis of the principles of social justice, the differences which exist in the level of maintenance of sick people in different medical establishments should be eliminated; this refers particularly to the sanatoria and rest-homes of government departments, including the Fourth Chief Administration attached to the Ministry of Health of the USSR. (*Applause*).<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Gorbachev also believes that a new generation of efficient administrators should be properly rewarded for their work. In September 1988 he told representatives of the media: 'Wage war on bureaucrats. But at the same time bear in mind that revolutionary renewal will not work without a good body of cadres (*kadrovyy korpus*) which has accepted the ideas of *perestroika* or has developed and established itself in the process of *perestroika*.'<sup>10</sup> Whether the democratization of the Soviet Union will produce a society without a ruling class is a matter for future political struggle.

#### From the Administrative System to the Market

The supporters of *perestroika* almost all believe that the elimination of the administrative-command system, with or without the overthrow of the bureaucracy as a class, necessarily involves a much greater role for the market. At the 27th Party Congress in February 1986 Gorbachev merely spoke cautiously of the need to strengthen 'commodity-money relations'. At that time many Western specialists believed that he merely intended to increase the role of *khozraschet* within the command economy. But by 1989 he was unambiguous: 'a decisive direction of the economic reform must be to establish a full-blooded socialist market. The market is not of course all-powerful. But humanity has not worked out another more effective and democratic mechanism for managing the economy. The socialist planned economy cannot do without it, comrades. This must be recognized.'<sup>11</sup> And V.A. Medvedev enthusiastically declared: 'The market—is if speculative distortions are eliminated—is one of the greatest achievements of human civilization.'<sup>12</sup>

How much should be planned by the state, and how much left to the market, is so far quite unclear. Some enthusiasts for the market would go as far as Mrs Thatcher, or even Milton Friedman. One author proposed that medical treatment should be the subject of an annual contract between patient and polyclinic, paid for by the personal income or insurance of the patient. Similarly, housing financed by the state or the municipal authorities should be available only to those with special needs. According to this author, this drastic cut in state

<sup>9</sup> *Izvestiya*, 31 May, 18 June 1989. The Fourth Administration is responsible for privileged medical facilities for officials.

<sup>10</sup> *Izvestiya*, 16 September 1988.

<sup>11</sup> *Izvestiya*, 31 May 1989.

<sup>12</sup> *Kommunist* 17, 1988, p. 17.

welfare provision would not be a departure from socialism, 'only from the socialism which Stalin thought up'.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, V.A. Medvedev insisted that the economy needs a strong centre to manage the market, citing Alec Nove in his support.<sup>14</sup> Ryzhkov takes a similar line: 'I am firmly convinced that the market will be able to develop successfully in the new system of economic management and will serve the good of human beings only if we create an effective economic mechanism to control it, securing the reliable defence of the interests of the citizens from market spontaneity.'<sup>15</sup>

On several occasions Gorbachev has also rejected the extreme ideas of the market economists, including proposals to close down all loss-making farms immediately, and to get rid of shortages on the retail market simply by letting prices rise till supply equals demand.<sup>16</sup> Gorbachev intends that the state should continue its role both as a provider of social services and as the general regulator of the economy. But he has not committed himself to the continuation of any direct administration of production and investment by the state. At the Congress of Soviets he outlined quite limited functions for the state: State management 'will be freed from the functions of direct interference in the operational administration of economic units and concentrated on the establishment of general normative frameworks and conditions for their activity. Its natural spheres will remain: the key directions of scientific and technical progress; the infrastructure; the defence of the environment; securing that people are adequately supported socially; the financial system, including its instruments of taxation; and economic legislation, including legislation against monopoly and its negative consequences for society.'<sup>17</sup>

### From State Ownership to Common Ownership

Together with the rejection of the bureaucratic command structure in favour of the market, the new model of socialism has also abandoned the assumption that state ownership is the highest form of common ownership. Instead, state, cooperative and even individual ownership are deemed to be of equal status in the socialist economy; the choice between them should be decided by practical experience.<sup>18</sup> On one occasion Gorbachev even asserted that 'the main criterion of the socialist nature of any social forms, institutions or transformations... is in the answer to the question: are human beings the means or the ends?'<sup>19</sup> This is a dangerous statement: any capitalist government might assert that its society was socialist by this criterion. At the Congress of Soviets, Gorbachev offered a more exacting criterion: 'We are in favour of the creation of flexible and effective social

<sup>13</sup> *Nedel'ya* 21, 1989 (A. Venediktov, a correspondent of the journal *Tekhnika i nauka*); in the same issue the influential economist Petrakov took a somewhat similar view.

<sup>14</sup> *Kommunist* 17, 1988, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Izvestiya*, 8 June 1989.

<sup>16</sup> *Pravda*, 31 March 1989; *Izvestiya*, 31 May 1989.

<sup>17</sup> *Izvestiya*, 31 May 1989.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Gorbachev's statement to a central committee plenum, *Pravda*, 16 March 1989.

<sup>19</sup> *Pravda*, 16 November 1988 (speech in Orel).

relations in regard to the utilization of social wealth; each form of property should demonstrate its power and its right to existence in the course of lively emulation and just competition. Only one condition is required: that exploitation and the alienation of the worker from the means of production should not be permitted.<sup>20</sup>

### Self-Management and Self-Finance

This brings us to the important question of 'self-administration' or 'self-management' (*samopravlenie*), a term used to mean something like 'producers' democracy'. Throughout the 1970s Soviet industry devoted a great deal of attention to arrangements by which teams (*brigady*) of workers in state factories elected their team-leaders (*brigadiry*) and worked with some collective autonomy.<sup>21</sup> Then in 1983 a 'Law on Labour Collectives' declared that 'the decisions of meetings of the labour collective... are binding on members of the collective and the management of the enterprise'. This provision was hedged with qualifications, and was hardly carried out at all in practice.<sup>22</sup> But these experiments in 'self-management' were a remarkable departure from the previous theory and practice of Soviet socialism. They were advocated by prominent supporters of reform such as Kurashvili (in the Institute of State and Law), Aganbegyan and Zaslavskaya (from the Novosibirsk group) and L.A. Gordon (from the Institute for the History of the International Workers' Movement). We do not yet understand the political processes behind the scenes at the top which enabled these measures to go forward in a time of apparent stagnation, albeit in truncated form.

Kurashvili consistently argued that the economic independence of enterprises should be coupled with their democratic management by those who worked in them.<sup>23</sup> In the first two years after the appointment of Gorbachev as CPSU general secretary, support for self-management and support for the socialist market economy grew in tandem. The economic reform adopted in July 1987 was a convoluted compromise between different views, and self-management appeared very prominently in it. The Law on the State Enterprise declared both that the enterprise must be self-financing, and that the labour collective was the master of the enterprise. The Law also firmly stated that the Council of the Labour Collective (STK) in each enterprise 'decides all production and social questions'.<sup>24</sup>

Self-management by the labour collective is supposed to be consistent

<sup>20</sup> *Izvestiya*, 31 May 1989.

<sup>21</sup> See *Soviet Studies*, vol. xxxix (1987) pp. 205-28 (J.C. Moses) and D. Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism*, London 1987, pp. 182-213.

<sup>22</sup> See D. Lane, ed., *Labour and Employment in the USSR*, London 1986, 239-55 (B. Teague), and *Soviet Studies*, vol. xxxvii (1985), 173-83 (D. Slider).

<sup>23</sup> *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* 6, 1982, pp. 38-48 (B.P. Kurashvili). Kurashvili's views are further discussed by R. Amann in *Dokenty* 8, 1987, 8-10.

<sup>24</sup> The provisions of the Law are discussed by S.I. Shkurko in *Sotsialisticheskiy trud* 4, 1989, pp. 45-7; Shkurko argues that this provision should be qualified so as to make it clear that the Council of the Labour Collective cannot take decisions outside its competence, for instance disposing of resources which are not available.

with 'one-person management' by the director of the enterprise. The labour collective decides basic strategy, and the director and his staff then administer this strategy in detail without interference from the STK. Draft legislation on the division of authority between the STK and the managers of the enterprise strongly emphasizes that *ultimate* authority is intended to rest with the labour collective.<sup>25</sup> The relationship between STK and enterprise director has been described as analogous to the relationship in a capitalist economy between a ship's owner and its captain.<sup>26</sup> How authority should be distributed between management and the self-managing labour collective has been widely but inconclusively discussed.<sup>27</sup>

The principle of self-management restores a crucial aspect of the nineteenth-century concept of a socialist society. And in pragmatic terms it is a powerful force against the command system. The party and government officials who manage the command system derive their power from their ability to interfere in the activities of enterprises, and from their control over the appointment and dismissal of managers. The new rights of the labour collectives fundamentally challenge this authority.

Apart from broad statements of principle, the future relationship between the state, the management of the enterprise and the labour collective is quite uncertain, and is the subject of ferocious experimentation. The favourite scheme in 1989 is *arrenda*—the renting-out of the enterprise as a whole to its labour collective, and of sub-units within the enterprise to those who work there.<sup>28</sup>

In all its various forms, self-management combined with self-finance has been applied in practice only in a minute number of enterprises. But several crucial problems have already emerged. First, as Yugoslav experience has shown, there is a strong tendency for the labour collective to distribute all the net earnings of the enterprise as wages, leaving as little as possible for investment. Soviet protagonists of self-management have accordingly proposed a variety of share schemes to counteract this tendency. Shares in the enterprise are issued to those who work there, so that they will have a stake in its future. In most of these schemes, workers derive a substantial part of their income from the shares, which also provide a large supplement to their pensions. Shares have to be cashed when the worker leaves the enterprise or when the pensioner dies.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, should self-financing self-managed enterprises be required

<sup>25</sup> See *Sotsialisticheski trnd* 3, 1989, pp. 42–6, and 5, 1989, pp. 58–61; these drafts, published in the official organ of the State Committee on Labour and Social Questions, were prepared by 'the temporary scientific collective of students, postgraduates, research workers and teaching staff of Moscow State University'.

<sup>26</sup> *Sotsialisticheski trnd* 5, 1988, p. 68.

<sup>27</sup> See for example *Voprasy ekonomiki* 5, 1989, pp. 60–1 (A.G. Kulikov).

<sup>28</sup> For the proceedings of a conference on *arrenda* see *Voprasy ekonomiki* 3, 1989, 35–53.

<sup>29</sup> For examples of the share arrangements, see *Sotsialisticheski trnd* 5, 1989, pp. 15–22 (Lvov engineering corporation 'Konveier'), and more generally *ibid*, no. 4, 1989, pp. 3–6 (Bunich, chair of the scientific council on *khovrascha*).

to conform with the USSR-wide legislation on wages and working conditions in state enterprises? One school of thought strongly criticizes national wage-scales as responsible for enforcing equal payments for unequal work, and insists that every enterprise should make its own arrangements. Fedorov, director of the famous eye-surgery cooperative, even denounced national wage-scales as 'a kind of atavism of slave society'.<sup>30</sup> One author went so far as to claim that it was Stalin's *anti*-egalitarian reforms of 1931 which led to the introduction of the system of wage-scales which resulted in egalitarianism.<sup>31</sup> Other writers strongly defend the retention of the national wage-scales, as an essential means of providing a guaranteed minimum; but they also believe that considerable variations in schemes for wage payment should be permitted, according to the decision of the enterprise itself.<sup>32</sup>

A third problem seems much more difficult to cope with. If self-management is coupled with share ownership, workers will be disinclined to move to another factory or industry. And the labour collective may well be unwilling to declare their fellow-workers redundant—they are after all share-holding joint 'owners'. Can a system of self-management be designed which is compatible with the mobility of labour?<sup>33</sup>

But it is a fourth difficulty which is the overwhelming practical obstacle to successful experimentation: the continuing of the command system. Both wholesale and retail prices are still fixed from above; most production decisions are dictated by state orders; and most supplies are obtained through the central supply system. Enterprises deal not with the market but with the administered plan. This introduces a great deal of arbitrariness, to put it mildly, into the earnings of enterprises. Managers and workers depend for the level of their earnings not only on their own activities but also on the higher authorities.

This undermines the argument that workers should accept financial sacrifices so as to make 'their own' enterprises profitable. In Noril'sk, a coal-mine was put on a self-financing basis and as a result the job-rates (payment per unit of output) were slashed. The miners, supported by informal groups and by some party members, occupied the mine for five days. The mine management and the Ministry insisted that there was no source available to finance the previous level of wages, and a letter from the Council of Ministers and the All-Union Council of Trade Unions uncompromisingly declared that 'the fault for what happened wholly rests with a small group of irresponsible agitators, whose aims have nothing in common with the interests of the collective'. Throughout the dispute, all the administrators

<sup>30</sup> *Nedel'ny* 2, 1989.

<sup>31</sup> *Sotsialisticheskii trud* 12, 1988, p. 78 (R. Khasbulatov).

<sup>32</sup> See for example *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta* 21, 1989 (L. Kunel'skii).

<sup>33</sup> The Hertzka self-management model of 1886–90 assumed free mobility of labour, so that any worker had the right to be taken on by any firm, but it is difficult to think of a practicable version of this (see *Journal of Comparative Economics*, vol. 10 (1986), 237–54—A. Chilosí).

assumed without question that the prevailing prices, profits deductions and sales conditions could not be changed.<sup>34</sup>

Self-management on this basis will naturally be seen by the workers merely as a means of enforcing state exploitation. In an interview, V.I. Shimko, head of the social and economic department of the party central committee, pointed out that on some recent occasions collectives had demanded that wage increases should be paid from state reserves: 'On this basis serious conflicts develop between the labour collective and the administration.'<sup>35</sup>

## Equality

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Khrushchev somewhat reduced the differentiation of incomes generally; and then in the 1970s the gap in earnings between most professionals and the less-skilled further narrowed.<sup>36</sup> Most reformers now argue that these egalitarian trends were one of the causes of economic stagnation. They believe that earnings should be differentiated more sharply, and purport to believe that this is compatible with socialism. While privileges based on office should be swept aside, they should be replaced by differentiation of earnings based on the value of the work as measured on the market. In his report on the occasion of the anniversary of Lenin's birth, V.A. Medvedev emphasized that 'the differentiation of incomes will obviously increase . . . Demagogic calls for equalizing the incomes of everyone and everything are alien to socialism.'<sup>37</sup> This view is shared by most leading intellectuals. Igor Klyamkin declared that greater differentiation of earnings in accordance with efficiency would be a major ingredient of the forthcoming 'spiritual revolution'.<sup>38</sup>

The present reforms resume Stalin's drive against 'egalitarianism' (*xravnilovka*). But in the vast literature about Stalin published since 1986, his anti-egalitarian drive launched in 1931 is almost invariably passed over in silence. In an era of widening *glasnost*, this subject has become a new 'blank spot' about the past.<sup>39</sup>

What greater differentiation of incomes could mean in practice was indicated by Academician Zaslavskaya. Rejecting the 'popular Soviet

---

<sup>34</sup> The story is told from the administration point of view in *Ekonomichestkaya gazeta* 16, 1989.

<sup>35</sup> *Ekonomichestkaya gazeta* 19, 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Simultaneously, however, the privileges in real terms of the highest levels of officialdom substantially increased.

<sup>37</sup> *Pravda*, 22 April 1989.

<sup>38</sup> *Novyy mir* 2, 1989, p. 236.

<sup>39</sup> There is a slightly astonishing exception. In *Nedelnye* 21, 1989 A. Venediktov, citing the long passage about egalitarianism in Stalin's interview with the German writer Emil Ludwig (*Sobremennyye*, vol. xii (1949), p. 119), claims that this is an example of Stalin's hypocrisy: 'By the way the great nourisher of socialism [i.e. Stalin] was in words also against any equalization . . . In words he was also, as we would say now, in favour of *perestroika* . . . The tyrant was not stupid; he knew well what he had created, and he did not hurry to create what he had promised in words.'



view' that income as high as 2000 rubles per month must be // 'dishonest' (average earnings are about 240 rubles), she suggested that the ceiling for earnings should be 10,000 rubles.<sup>40</sup> However, the call for greater income differentiation has not gone unchallenged. V.Z. Rogovin has sturdily defended the cause of greater equality<sup>41</sup>; and at a round-table organized jointly by the industrial newspaper and the research institute of the Academy of Social Sciences speakers called for improved wages and services for ordinary workers, and the imposition of a maximum wage.<sup>42</sup>

The plans to increase income differentiation have met with widespread public opposition. Klyamkin admitted that 'millions of people' believe that progress should be accompanied by greater equality: 'Khrushchev did not adopt the policy of overcoming the gap in wages accidentally—he followed mass expectations'.<sup>43</sup> In this respect a large section of the Soviet public still adheres to the pre-1931 concept of socialism.

#### IV. The Future of Soviet Socialism

In April 1987, in one of the first frank public discussions about the future of socialism to have taken place in the Soviet Union since the 1920s, L.A. Gordon suggested four possible scenarios: first, and most desirable, radical economic reforms combined with democratization; secondly, the continuation of directive planning combined with the authoritarian political regime, cleansed of their worst features; thirdly, democratization without radical reform; fourthly, radical economic reform without democratization.<sup>44</sup> At the end of 1989, all these scenarios are still claiming their right to perform on the Soviet stage. A moderate variant of the first scenario predominates: major strides have been taken towards democratization, and the reform programme presented by Abalkin in November 1989, if put into effect, would certainly change the economic system fundamentally. The second scenario still has many advocates: at the conference to which Abalkin presented his programme many industrial managers and officials supported a call for social order and the return to greater centralized control of the economy.<sup>45</sup> The third scenario is roughly what exists at the end of 1989: democratization and *glasnost* have far outpaced economic reform. And a remarkable feature of 1989 has been the unexpected emergence of the fourth scenario, in spite of the repression in Tiananmen Square: a number of reformers have strongly advocated the assumption of authoritarian presidential

<sup>40</sup> EKO 10, 1988, pp. 93-4.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Rogovin's reply in *Druzhba narodov* 10, 1988, pp. 181-8, to the heated attack on him by G. Lisichkin (*ibid.* no. 1, 1988).

<sup>42</sup> *Sotsialisticheskaya industriya*, 18 April 1989 (speeches by E. Zhil'tsov, a professor at Moscow University, and P. Savchenko of the Institute of Economics). Zhil'tsov cited the example of China, claiming that the top-bottom wage gap was between 5:1 and 7:1.

<sup>43</sup> *Novyi mir* 2, 1989 p. 236.

<sup>44</sup> *Voprosy filosofii* 11, 1988, pp. 51-3. This contribution had been revised before publication, as it mentioned Nina Andreeva's letter of March 1988.

<sup>45</sup> See *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 22 November 1989.

powers by Gorbachev as the only means to bring about a radical change in the economic system.<sup>46</sup>

By the end of 1989 the dominant trend of opinion among reformers went much further than the government reform programme, and advocated a 'full-blooded' variant of the first scenario, in which nearly all economic decisions would be taken on the market, and a variety of different forms of ownership, including capitalist ownership, would be permitted. The case for the market economy was presented by Selyunin in a well-known article published in May 1988. On his account the history of Russia since the sixteenth century was one of struggle between the emerging market economy and the repressive state; economic progress occurred only when the market was free from the depredations of the state.<sup>47</sup> At that time a leading Soviet historian reported that 'the notion has suddenly become widespread that there was a "Stolypin alternative" in the history of Russia, and that this would have spared it from revolutionary upheavals and sacrifices.'<sup>48</sup>

Stolypin sought to establish peasant capitalist agriculture within the framework of a capitalist system; and there is no doubt that a substantial number of Soviet reformers believe that the Soviet Union should be transformed into a capitalist democracy. This view has been expressed much more openly in the course of 1989, and has become popular among a large section of the intelligentsia. At the Congress of Soviets the chairman of the Moscow Trade Unions, V.S. Shcherbakov, accused the 'radical' group of Moscow deputies of supporting 'purely market relations, the transfer of state enterprises into private hands, the creation of a free market for labour—can't they think up anything more suitable?'<sup>49</sup> This was an exaggerated characterization of the Moscow group as a whole, and of the larger 'inter-regional' group of deputies to which they now belong, but it accurately described a very important trend among the economic reformers. In this view, which has now become government policy in Hungary and Poland, capitalism is the only alternative to state socialism, and most industries should be privatized.

Privatization on any substantial scale would be technically very difficult to achieve in the Soviet Union, with its vast industries and its lack of any capitalist class; and in any case the idea is still very unpopular among the population at large. So the plan for a transition from socialism to capitalism is put forward with some circumspection. Gavril Popov, now an influential vice-chairman of the inter-regional group of deputies, argued at the Congress of People's Deputies in June 1989: 'The experience of developed capitalist countries shows that economically developed countries have a state

<sup>46</sup> For the debate about the 'iron hand', see *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 16 August (I. Klyamkin and A. Migaryan), 20 September (L. Barkin) and 17 September 1989 (survey of readers' letters).

<sup>47</sup> *Novyi mir* 5, 1988, pp. 162–89 (V. Selyunin).

<sup>48</sup> *Voprosy istorii* 3, 1988, p. 22 (V.P. Danilov).

<sup>49</sup> *Izvestiya*, 4 June 1989.

sector of about 30–40 per cent. Taking into account our traditions and the interests of social control in the hands of the state, it is sufficient to keep 50 per cent of the economy. The remaining 50 per cent must be transferred to cooperatives and to the private, individual sector.<sup>30</sup>

In June 1989 this seemed a radical proposal. But a few months later he claimed much more bluntly at a conference held under the auspices of the party central committee that the forces of production even in more advanced countries were not sufficiently developed to enable them to progress without private ownership. According to Popov's casuistic argument, if the Soviet Union followed a Marxist approach, it would bring its relations of production into line with its forces of production, which were insufficiently advanced to be organized as social production (by permitting private ownership).<sup>31</sup> As for agriculture, 'we must do what was done by the unforgettable Stolypin; we must introduce *otrub*s and *khutors* [peasant family farms separated from the village commune]'.<sup>32</sup>

Academician Shatalin was even franker. He explained that 'at the time when they were distracted by nationalization the French and the English even socialized motor-car and aircraft firms'; and he declared that 'progress in Britain is associated with the conservative Thatcher', praising her success in 'denationalizing practically everything'. According to Shatalin, only the infrastructure such as roads and telephones should be in the hands of the state, though the cooperative sector should also be of major importance.<sup>33</sup>

For the time being the 'privatizers' have concluded that any substantial move towards privatization is impossible owing to popular hostility to capitalism. 'One should not be frightened of private ownership, there is nothing terrible in it,' Shatalin assured the central committee conference in October. 'But it is not appropriate today to propose it as a programmatic task.'<sup>34</sup> Instead, they hope that the renting-out of enterprises and the introduction of shareholding will produce the same result. Shareholding by workers in an enterprise can be, as we have seen, an aspect of self-management. But if shares can also be owned by other enterprises, or by individuals, such joint-stock arrangements could be a major step towards private ownership. 'After all,' Shatalin ingenuously remarked at the central committee conference, 'the issue of shares also leads to private ownership.' And Nikolai Shmelev, another influential economist, explained that from the point of view of economic technique, 'there is no difference between a joint-stock [or share-holding—the word *aktsionernoe* is the same in Russian] socialist enterprise and an association of shareholders [a joint-stock company] in the West, or between their managers.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Pravda*, 11 June 1989.

<sup>31</sup> *Pravda*, 11 November 1989.

<sup>32</sup> *Pozitsiya* (Tartu) 1, October 1989.

<sup>33</sup> *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 11 October 1989.

<sup>34</sup> *Pravda*, 30 October 1990.

<sup>35</sup> *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 23 March 1989.

Many proposals have been made which involve the issue of shares not only to those working in the enterprise but also on some kind of share market or stock exchange. According to one proposal, the leases (*arenda*) of enterprises should not be signed with their labour collectives, but offered on a competitive basis, so that they go to 'entrepreneurial leaders with initiative'.<sup>56</sup> The schemes under way to involve foreign capital in Soviet enterprises could be an even more effective move towards capitalism.

During 1989 significant preparations were made for converting state industry into rented-out joint-stock companies. In June a significant clause was quietly slipped into a general policy resolution of the Supreme Soviet: 'Conditions shall be created for the formation of a socialist market, including a market for shares [*issuinye bumagi*] and for investment resources.'<sup>57</sup>

During the autumn a committee of the Supreme Soviet chaired by P. Bunich prepared a wide-ranging Law on Renting-Out [*arenda*]. This envisages that state enterprises would be rented out, usually but not necessarily to the workers at the enterprise, and that this would be combined with forms of share ownership. The Law thus would permit both self-managed enterprises and enterprises managed by a lessee separate from those who work in it. In the case of small enterprises, Bunich rhetorically asked: 'Why should not a private individual become a lessee and take on, say, fifty associates to work for him?'<sup>58</sup>

Whether the new arrangements become a bridge to self-managed socialism or to the establishment of a large private sector in the economy depends on the strength of the self-management arrangements. During 1989 criticism of self-management (or producers' democracy) became much stronger. In the party theoretical journal, A. Nekipelov, of the Institute of the Economics of the World Socialist System, suggested that self-management by labour collectives would prevent the efficient transfer of capital and labour between industries, and therefore undermine the attempt to form a socialist market; the alternative would be to establish a market for labour as well as goods, and to link the earnings of *managers* to profits.<sup>59</sup> Another writer claimed somewhat prematurely that 'party policy is oriented on the development of a real market, including a market for capital and labour', and in this context frankly repudiated self-management: 'How justified are the attempts to introduce self-management here, particularly when economic regulators are not yet operating? After all the needs of democracy and economic efficiency often fail to coincide, and even contradict each other. So far not even one country has made production democracy work. The whole world is following a different path, developing business administration on the basis of one-person management.'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Voprosy ekonomiki*, no. 3, 1989, pp. 45-6 (V. Volkonskii, Central Mathematical Economics Institute TSIEM), p. 13 (L. Nikiforov and V. Rutgaizer).

<sup>57</sup> *Pravda*, 25 June 1989.

<sup>58</sup> See the interview with Bunich in *Ogoniok* 47, 1989.

<sup>59</sup> *Kommunist* 7, 1989, pp. 15-22.

<sup>60</sup> *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 19 April 1989 (L. Shevtsova).

Speaking to the USSR Factory Directors' Club in May 1989, Academician Aganbegyan frankly declared: 'From my point of view, the election [of directors] was inspired by the wish to activate the workers. But the further we go, the more obvious are the negative sides of this system... I think that in a few years we will have to reconsider the Law on the State Enterprise and give up election in its present form.'<sup>64</sup> More recently, workers self-management was severely restricted in a number of ministries by a Council of Ministers decree, leading to 'a very negative reaction by the population'.<sup>65</sup>

Hostility to self-management will undoubtedly be reinforced by the advice from the numerous Western firms and management consultants which are being employed to improve Soviet business efficiency. George Soros, head of the Soros Foundation which has financed many projects in Eastern Europe, commented after a recent visit to the USSR: 'The reformers want to abolish these privileges [of *nomenklatura* personnel, etc.], and they also want to maintain an egalitarian approach to wages and prices, which is incompatible with economic reform. They embrace the concept of self-management—long after it has proved unworkable in Yugoslavia—but they are unwilling to reward entrepreneurial ability and risk-taking.'<sup>66</sup>

In one scenario, then, the backlash against the election of managers and against self-management by labour collectives could result in the emergence of state firms which closely resemble private-capitalist firms, operating on a free market and rented-out to a management not elected or even controlled by the workforce. Simultaneously, small- and medium-scale capitalist firms could be legalized, along the lines envisaged by some influential reformers. Soviet socialism would then incorporate a very large element of capitalism. Until a year or two ago, Trotsky's prediction in *The Revolution Betrayed* that state bureaucrats might be transformed into private capitalists seemed to have been completely falsified by history. Even with the scenario we have outlined, it would still not be correct in detail, because a new generation of specialists and others would lease the state firms. Nevertheless Trotsky's prediction has unexpectedly turned from a wild misjudgement into an imaginative prophecy.

In contrast to the 'radical' pro-capitalist economists, a significant group of prominent intellectuals strongly supports workers' self-management, and regards it as compatible with economic reform. I have already mentioned the very active group of students and teachers at Moscow University which is preparing detailed draft regulations on self-management. Other intellectuals support a very broad concept of workers' management and workers' democracy, encouraged by the rehabilitation of Shlyapnikov and the Workers' Opposition of 1920–21. Thus one writer on labour problems has called for the formation

<sup>64</sup> *EkO*, 9, 1989, p. 77. On 13 December Ryzhkov, the prime minister, bluntly declared that in state enterprises the director 'obviously must not be elected but appointed'.

<sup>65</sup> See speech by A.A. Sobchak at the central committee economists' conference, *Pravda*, 10 October 1989.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Review of Books*, 1 June 1989.

of local, republican and USSR-wide Councils of Labour Collectives which would examine key social issues in the national-economic plans, national investment policy and difficulties in the election of managers; the aim should be to transform workers into 'actual co-owners of production.'<sup>64</sup> A long article in the popular weekly *Ogonok* described the Soviet period of history in terms of the suppression of the rights of the working class, and argued that the working class and the intelligentsia should cooperate to drive out the bureaucrats. According to the author, 'the fate of the workers and the intelligentsia is indivisible'; their cooperation is possible because of the close ties of the intelligentsia with the working class which already exist (*sic*).<sup>65</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that the 'workers' democracy' trend is less influential among intellectuals than the 'free-market' or so-called 'radical' trend. And the 'workers' democracy' trend is also weaker in the sense that its specific proposals for the reform of the economy as a whole are considerably vaguer than those of the 'radicals'. But the intellectual arguments of the supporters of workers' democracy have been reinforced by the emergence of independent working-class political and economic activity in the Soviet Union, the embryo, perhaps, of an independent working-class movement. According to a Soviet survey, between 1985 and 1988 the number of strikes greatly increased. They were often a response to managerial attempts to cope with the first stages of economic reform by increases in job-rates, compulsory overtime, and administrative pressure to put brigades or enterprises on a self-financing basis. Some strikes were in protest against the failure to elect managers democratically.<sup>66</sup> In the spring of 1989 the central committee official Shimko also reported the development of 'open conflicts and mass actions', including strikes. He attributed them particularly to wage disputes and to the transfer of enterprises to full *khozraschet* and to *arrenda*. Frequently new arrangements for determining wages were introduced without consulting the labour collective; STKs were sometimes passive and fitted in with the management. Shimko admitted that the protests often received wide support: 'Extremist elements actively use the threat of strikes. But we must observe that the healthy part of the working class is also included.'<sup>67</sup>

Even before 1989 attempts were made to set up independent working-class organizations.<sup>68</sup> In the course of 1985-88 informal workers'

<sup>64</sup> *Moscow News* 45, 1988 (V. Perlamutrov of TAEBO).

<sup>65</sup> V. Kostikov, 'A Hero Not in a Poster', *Ogonok* 17, 1989, pp. 26-30.

<sup>66</sup> *Voprosy ekonomiki* 4, 1989, pp. 120-9 (E. Leont'eva, a correspondent of the industrial newspaper *Sotrudnichestvo v industrii*). This informative article explains that the Institute of Sociology, the Centre for the Study of Public Opinion, the State Committee for Labour, the trade unions, the State Committee for Statistics and the research institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs all fail to study social conflicts: one person is engaged in this research in the Institute of the International Workers' Movement (the author does not mention the KGB...).

<sup>67</sup> *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta* 19, 1989. For evidence, based on a survey in Kharkov, that the economic bureaucracy has tended to take over the STKs, regiment them artificially, or turn them into a 'talking-shop', see *Voprosy ekonomiki* 5, 1989, p. 79 (V. Glushenko).

<sup>68</sup> See *Voprosy ekonomiki* 4, 1989, p. 121 (E. Leont'eva).

clubs were established in a number of towns and factories, and, following a case of the unjust dismissal of a worker reported in the Komsomol newspaper, some of the clubs formed a joint inter-urban workers' club. By the beginning of 1989 this was meeting quite regularly to discuss the experience of self-management;<sup>69</sup> it was reported in the summer as having members in 23 towns, though it involved only 600-700 people altogether.<sup>70</sup>

By the summer of 1989 there were two distinct but over-lapping trends within this embryonic movement. First, to secure real powers at the workplace for ordinary workers; secondly, to defend and advance the material interests of the workers within a factory or industry, or in the working class as a whole, in face of the privileges of the management and the state bureaucracy. Both these trends were present in the large-scale miners' strikes of the summer and autumn, which forced the workers as a social force on the attention of Soviet intellectuals and Western commentators. The strikes involved several hundred thousand miners in the Kuzbass in Siberia, in the Donbass region, and in Vorkuta in the North. Their starting point was the failure of the authorities to remedy long-standing grievances about food, housing and working conditions. As the strikes developed, the workers' demands were increasingly directed against the bureaucracy, and newly elected strike committees, independent of the control of the trade unions, assumed considerable authority both in the mines and in the mining towns. Many members of these strike committees were elected to the Councils of Workers' Collectives. Something like a genuine if fragile workers' democracy had come into being. The miners' representatives sought to combine workers' democracy with economic reform: they called for the autonomy of the mines under the control of the workers, and for their right to sell freely part of their own output.<sup>71</sup> But as yet no satisfactory reformed national economic framework existed within which the mines could operate.

During and after the strikes, two rival political tendencies sought to capture the workers' movement and to wield it in their own interests. First, the Russian nationalists, together with the official trade unions, have organized workers' movements. The first major 'workers' front' of this kind met in Leningrad in June 1989; and then on 8-9 September the constituent congress of the United Front of Working People of Russia (the OFT, from its Russian initials) assembled in Sverdlovsk. The Congress fiercely attacked 'the ill-considered economic policy which has opened the way to gaining non-working incomes via the pseudo-cooperatives, and has oriented state enterprises on profit and not on the satisfaction of the needs of the working people and the urban population.' It also called for elections to the soviets to be based on the workplace rather than place of residence,

<sup>69</sup> See *Voprosy ekonomiki* 4, 1989, p. 121 (B. Leont'eva).

<sup>69</sup> *Sotsialisticheski trud* 3, 1989, pp. 68-73.

<sup>70</sup> *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 13 September 1989.

<sup>71</sup> A careful account of the Kuzbass strikes may be found in *Znamye* 10, 1989 (Yu. Anenchenko).

/ and for a currency reform directed against the holders of large amounts of illegally acquired money.<sup>72</sup>

There is no unanimity in the OBT and similar organizations. Many of its members sincerely advocate workers' democracy. But one extreme wing is strongly tinged with anti-semitism.<sup>73</sup> It is fair to say that the whole organization is conservative in the sense that it wants to retain the present 'command-administrative' economic system, albeit with greater rights for workers. Reflecting these views, Ligachev, at the plenum of the party central committee of 19–20 September 1989, condemned those who are 'in favour of moving towards capitalism and bourgeois democracy, of introducing private property into the economy and a multi-party system into the political system'.<sup>74</sup>

The 'radical' supporters of private property and the free market are also making strong efforts to win over the workers' movement. When a new miners' strike broke out in Vorkuta in November 1989, representatives of the inter-regional group of deputies and of the cooperatives attempted to win their support. The cooperatives made an agreement with the miners to help them establish trading cooperatives and a cooperative bank, so as to enable them to sell the 20 per cent of above-plan output which the mines are now entitled to dispose of freely.<sup>75</sup> The evolution of Solidarity in Poland shows that a workers' movement supporting evolution towards capitalism: in the course of his visit to Britain in December 1989, Lech Walesa declared that a large part of Polish industry needed to be privatized.<sup>76</sup>

Neither the Russian nationalists nor the 'radical' economists are seeking to combine both economic reform and workers' management. At least for the moment, however, this remains the official policy of Gorbachev and his associates. Speaking at the plenum of the Ukrainian Central Committee in September 1989, Gorbachev insisted that 'perestroika is the renewal of socialism, not the dismantling of it ... a revolutionary transformation, eliminating the deformations of socialism, but not the restoration of capitalism.' Its basic principles included 'social ownership of the means of production', 'the real transformation of working people into the masters of all social production', and 'entrepreneurship, emulation, and bold initiative combined with a planned approach'.<sup>77</sup> Under pressure from conservatives on the one hand and 'radical' advocates of a move towards capitalism on the other, will Gorbachev be able to maintain this socialist position?

<sup>72</sup> *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 13 October 1989.

<sup>73</sup> In *Naib sovremennik* 8, 1989, M. Antonov presents the views of this wing of the movement with some verve.

<sup>74</sup> *Pravda*, 22 September 1989.

<sup>75</sup> Rival accounts of these attempts to influence the strikers appear in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 15 November 1989 (A. Buturlin, a deputy procurator) and 29 November 1989 (V. Tikhonov, head of the cooperatives).

<sup>76</sup> BBC2 TV, 12 December 1989.

<sup>77</sup> *Pravda*, 30 September 1989.

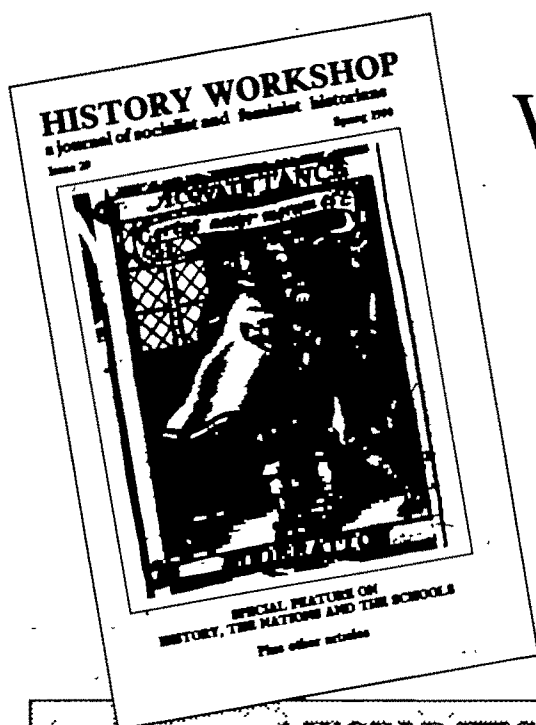


Nor is there yet any clear outcome of the struggle against egalitarianism. It is true that the initial stages of reform have already resulted in sharp increases in income differentiation. But this was not so much a deliberate result of the anti-egalitarian policy of the authorities, as an unintended consequence of the inflation resulting from the initial stages of reform. The establishment of cooperatives in conditions of repressed inflation enabled many cooperative members to acquire large incomes. Simultaneously, according to a Gosplan survey, the growing inflationary pressures have particularly hit the lower-paid groups. On the other hand, in spite of its strong declarations in favour of greater income differentiation, the Soviet government has prepared a series of measures which will increase the incomes of pensioners and the lower-paid; it has also prepared a draft law on personal income-tax which would somewhat reduce lower rates of tax and increase higher rates.

To sum up. The nature of the future socialist society in the USSR will be disputed not only between conservative supporters of the administrative system and enthusiasts for a rapid move towards a free market. The third factor is the debate about how far the bureaucratic system will be replaced by new forms of production democracy, how far by a mere imitation and adaptation of the capitalist enterprise. This is partly an intellectual dispute, in the sense that all groups of reformers have to work out how their variant of reform should be put into practice. But it is also a social and political struggle, the outcome of which is quite unclear. The fate of all the classic principles of socialism—equality, as well as common ownership and self-management—has not yet been determined. Even in outline, the Soviet model of socialism for the twenty-first century has not yet emerged.

©R.W. Davies

... now published by Oxford University Press



# HISTORY WORKSHOP JOURNAL

Issue 29  
Spring  
1990

## \* WORLD EXCLUSIVE \*

VICTOR DANILOV

LENIN AND TROTSKY IN 1922

A Soviet historian writes on hitherto suppressed documentation

## SPECIAL FEATURE

HISTORY, THE NATION AND THE SCHOOLS

Introduction by Anna Davin

J.C.D. Clark National Identity and History

Janet L. Nelson History and the National Curriculum

Sylvia L. Collicott Primary School History

Shula Marks History and the British Empire

Raphael Samuel Grand Narratives?

Plus other articles

## Single issue rates

Institutions: UK £13.00, EEC £14.50, N.America US\$26.00, elsewhere £15.50

Individuals: UK £9.95, EEC £11.50, N.America US\$20.00, elsewhere £12.50

To order or obtain further information please write to: Journals Publicity Dept.(nlr) Oxford University Press, Pinkhill House, Southfield Road, Eynsham, Oxford OX8 1JJ, U.K.

*Marxist Century, American Century: The  
Making and Remaking of the World  
Labour Movement*

▲

In the closing paragraphs of the first section of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels advance two distinct arguments why the rule of the bourgeoisie will come to an end.\* On the one hand, the bourgeoisie 'is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within its slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society cannot live under this bourgeoisie; in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.' On the other hand: 'The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.'<sup>1</sup> It will be my thesis here that these two predictions represent both the strength and the weakness of

the Marxian legacy. They represent its strength because they have been validated in many crucial respects by fundamental trends of the capitalist world-economy in the subsequent 140 years. And they represent its weakness because the two scenarios are in partial contradiction with each other and—what is more—the contradiction has lived on unresolved in the theories and practices of Marx's followers.

The contradiction, as I see it, is the following. The first scenario is of proletarian helplessness. Competition prevents the proletariat from sharing the benefits of industrial progress, and drives it into such a state of poverty that, instead of a productive force, it becomes a dead weight on society. The second scenario, in contrast, is of proletarian power. The advance of industry replaces competition with association among proletarians so that the ability of the bourgeoisie to appropriate the benefits of industrial progress are undermined.

For Marx, of course, there was no actual contradiction. The tendency towards the weakening of the proletariat concerned the Industrial Reserve Army and undermined the *legitimacy* of bourgeois rule. The tendency towards the strengthening of the proletariat concerned the Active Industrial Army and undermined the capacity of the bourgeoisie to appropriate surplus. Moreover, these two tendencies were not conceived as being independent of each other. To the extent that the capacity of the bourgeoisie to appropriate surplus is undermined, two effects concerning the Industrial Reserve Army follow. The means available to the bourgeoisie to 'feed', that is, to reproduce the Reserve Army are reduced, while the incentive to employ proletarian labour as a means to augment capital also decreases and, *ceteris paribus*, the Reserve Army increases. Hence, any increase in the power of the Active Industrial Army to resist exploitation is translated more or less automatically into a loss of legitimacy of the bourgeois order.

At the same time, any loss of legitimacy due to inability to assure the livelihood of the Reserve Army is translated more or less automatically into a greater (and qualitatively superior) power of the Active Army. For in Marx's view the Active and the Reserve Armies consisted of the same human material which was assumed to circulate more or less continuously from the one to the other. The same individuals would be part of the Active Army today and of the Reserve Army tomorrow, depending on the continuous ups and downs of enterprises, lines and locales of production. The bourgeois order would thus lose legitimacy among the members of the Reserve and Active Armies alike, thereby enhancing the tendency of whoever happened to be in the Active Army to turn their association in the productive process from an instrument of exploitation by the bourgeoisie into an instrument of struggle against the bourgeoisie.

---

\* This article will be published as chapter two of S. Amin, G. Arrighi, A.G. Frank and I. Wallerstein, *Transforming the Revolution. Social Movements and the World System*, Monthly Review Press, New York 1990. I am indebted to Terence K. Hopkins and Beverly J. Silver for comments and criticisms on earlier drafts of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Harmondsworth 1967, pp. 93-94.

### The Three Postulates

The power of this model lies in its simplicity. It is based on three postulates. First, as Marx was to state in Volume 3 of *Capital*, the limit of capital is capital itself. That is to say, the evolution and the eventual demise of capital are written in its 'genes'. The dynamic element is 'the advancement of industry', without which capitalist accumulation cannot proceed. But the advancement of industry replaces competition among the workers, on which accumulation rests, with their association. Sooner or later, capitalist accumulation becomes self-defeating.

This deterministic view, however, applies only to the system as a whole and over long periods of time; the outcome at particular places and at particular times is left entirely indeterminate. There are defeats and victories of the proletariat but both are necessarily temporary and localized events and tend to be 'averaged out' by the logic of competition among capitalist enterprises and among proletarians. The only thing that is inevitable in the model is that in the very long run capitalist accumulation creates the conditions for an increase in the number of proletarian victories over proletarian defeats until bourgeois rule is displaced, replaced or transformed beyond recognition.

The time and modalities of the transition to a post-bourgeois order are also left indeterminate. Precisely because the transition was made to depend on a multiplicity of victories and defeats combined spatially and temporally in unpredictable ways, little was said in the *Manifesto* about the contours of the future society, except that it would bear the imprints of proletarian culture—whatever that culture would be at the time of the transition.

A second postulate is that the agents of long-term, large-scale social change are personifications of structural tendencies. Competition among individual members of the bourgeoisie ensures the advancement of industry, while competition among individual members of the proletariat ensures that the benefits accrue to the bourgeoisie. The advancement of industry, however, means an ever-widening cooperation within and among labour processes, and at a certain stage of development, this transforms the proletariat from an ensemble of competing individuals into a cohesive class capable of putting an end to exploitation.

Consciousness and organization are reflections of structural processes of competition and cooperation which are not due to any individual or collective will. The multiple struggles waged by proletarians are an essential ingredient in the transformation of structural change into ideological and organizational change, but are themselves rooted in structural changes. This is the only 'understanding' that can be usefully 'brought to' the proletariat from outside its condition:

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties.

They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

The third postulate of the model is the primacy of the economy over culture and politics. The proletariat itself is defined in purely economic terms as 'a class of labourers, who live only as long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.'<sup>3</sup>

### The Proletarian Condition

To be sure, Marx's entire work was to disclose the fiction involved in treating labour as a commodity like any other. Being inseparable from its owner, and hence endowed with a will and an intelligence, the commodity labour-power was different from all other 'articles of commerce'. Yet, in the Marxian scheme this appeared only in the struggles of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, and even there only as an undifferentiated proletarian will and intelligence. Individual and group differences within the proletariat are minimized or dismissed

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 87. In this definition, which I shall adopt throughout, there is no indication that workers must be engaged in particular occupations ('blue collar', for instance) to qualify as members of the proletariat. Even expressions like 'industrial proletariat' must be understood to designate that segment which is normally employed by capitalist enterprises engaged in production and distribution, regardless of the kind of work performed or the branch of activity in which the enterprise operates.

Marx's definition is ambiguous, however, with regard to the upper and lower boundaries of the proletariat. At the upper end we face the problem of classifying workers who do sell their labour power for a wage, but from a position of individual strength that enables them to demand and obtain rewards for effort which, other things being equal, are higher than those received by the average worker. This is most clearly the case of the upper echelons of management, but a great variety of individuals (so-called 'professionals') work for a wage or salary without being proletarianized in any meaningful (i.e., substantial) sense of the word. In what follows, all such individuals are implicitly excluded from the ranks of the proletariat unless they are explicitly referred to as being only formally proletarianized.

At the lower end we face the opposite problem of classifying workers who do not find a buyer for their labour power (which they would be more than willing to sell at prevailing rates) and therefore engage in non-waged activities that bring rewards for effort which, other things being equal, are lower than those received by the average wage-worker. This is indeed the case with most of what Marx calls the Industrial Reserve Army. As a matter of fact, the entire Reserve Army is in this condition except for the small minority of individuals who qualify for unemployment benefits or can otherwise afford to remain fully and truly unemployed for any length of time. In what follows, all non-wage workers in the above condition will be implicitly included in the proletariat—in its Reserve Army, to be sure, but in the proletariat nonetheless.

as residuals of the past in the process of being eliminated by the laws of market competition. The proletarian has neither country nor family:

Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.<sup>4</sup>

[Modern] subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. . . .

National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.<sup>5</sup>

In the Marxian scheme, therefore, the proletarian is either an atomized individual competing with other (equally atomized) individuals over the means of subsistence, or a member of a universal class struggling against the bourgeoisie. Between the universal class and the atomized individual there is no intermediate aggregation capable of supplying security or status in competition with class membership. Market competition makes all such intermediate aggregations unstable and, hence, transient.

Similarly, the Marxian scheme reduces power struggles to a mere reflection of market competition or of the class struggle. There is no room for the pursuit of power for its own sake. The only thing that is pursued for its own sake is profit, the principal form of surplus through which historical accumulation takes place. Governments are instruments of competition or class rule, simply committees 'for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie'. Once again, it is market competition that forces governments into this mould. If they do not conform to the rules of the capitalist game, they are bound to lose out also in the power game:

The cheap prices of [its] commodities are the heavy artillery with which [the bourgeoisie] batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.<sup>6</sup>

In sum, the Marxian legacy originally consisted of a model of bourgeois society which made three strong predictions: 1. Bourgeois society tends to polarize into two classes, the bourgeoisie itself and the proletariat, understood as a class of workers who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. 2. Capitalist accumulation tends to impoverish and,

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 92, 102.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

simultaneously, to strengthen the proletariat within bourgeois society. The strengthening relates to the role of the proletariat as producer of social wealth, the impoverishment relates to its role as more or less commodified labour-power subject to all the vicissitudes of competition. 3. The socially and politically blind laws of market competition tend to merge these two tendencies into a general loss of legitimacy of the bourgeois order which provokes its supersession by a non-competitive, non-exploitative world order.

In order to assess the extent to which these predictions have been borne out by the subsequent history of capitalism, it is useful to break up the 140 years that separate us from 1848 into three periods of roughly equal length: 1848 to 1896; 1896 to 1948; and 1948 to the present. This periodization is meaningful for many of the problems at hand. They all correspond to a 'long wave' of economic activity, each comprising a phase of 'prosperity' in which relations of cooperation in the economy are predominant (A phases) and a phase of 'depression' in which relations of competition predominate (B phases). Besides that, each fifty-year period has its own specificities.

Between 1848 and 1896 market capitalism and bourgeois society, as analysed by Marx, reached their apogée. The modern labour movement was born in this period and immediately became the central anti-systemic force. After a protracted struggle against rival doctrines, Marxism became the dominant ideology of the movement. In the period 1896 to 1948 market capitalism and bourgeois society as theorized by Marx entered a prolonged and ultimately fatal crisis. The labour movement reached its apogée as the central anti-systemic force, and Marxism consolidated and extended its hegemony over anti-systemic movements. However, new divisions appeared within and among anti-systemic movements, and Marxism itself was split apart into a revolutionary and a reformist wing. After 1948 corporate or managerial capitalism emerged from the ashes of market capitalism as the dominant world-economic structure. The spread of anti-systemic movements increased further but so did their fragmentation and reciprocal antagonisms. Under the pressure of these antagonisms, Marxism has been thrown into a crisis from which it has yet to recover and, indeed, may never recover.

## I. The Rise of the World Labour Movement

The major trends and events of the first period (1848–1896) conformed to the expectations of the *Manifesto*. The spread of free-trade practices and the transport revolution in the 20–25 years that followed 1848 made market capitalism more of a world-wide reality than it had ever been before. World-market competition intensified and industry expanded rapidly for most of the fifty-year period. The proletarianization of intermediate strata became more pronounced, though not as widespread and irreversible as it is often claimed. Partly because of the contraction of the intermediate strata, partly because of a widening gap between the incomes of proletarian and bourgeois households, and partly because of the greater residential concentration and segregation of the proletariat, the polarization of society into two distinct



and counterposed classes seemed an indisputable tendency, though more so in some countries than in others.

The tendency of capitalist accumulation simultaneously to impoverish and strengthen the proletariat was also in evidence. The greater concentration of the proletariat associated with the spread of industrialization made its organization in the form of unions much easier, and the strategic position of wage-workers in the new production processes endowed these organizations with considerable power, not only vis-à-vis capitalist employers, but vis-à-vis governments as well. The successes of the British labour movement in the course of the mid-nineteenth century—a phase in limiting the length of the working day and in extending the franchise—were the most visible but not the only expression of such power. Yet, the proletariat was also being impoverished. Each victory had to be sanctioned by market forces which narrowly constrained the capacity of workers to resist the economic and political command of the bourgeoisie. It was in this period that unemployment acquired qualitatively and quantitatively new dimensions which curtailed the improvements in the proletariat's working and living conditions and intensified competitive pressures in its midst.

Finally, as predicted by the *Manifesto*, the two opposing tendencies of impoverishment and strengthening jointly undermined proletarian consent for bourgeois rule. A relatively free circulation of commodities, capital and workers within and across state jurisdictions spread the costs and risks of unemployment among proletarian households. The consequent loss of legitimacy led to an entirely new degree of political autonomy of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie. Only now did the era of working-class political parties begin. But whether or not such parties had come into existence, wage-workers in all core countries shook off their traditional subordination to the political interests of the bourgeoisie and began to pursue their own interests autonomously from, and if necessary against, the bourgeoisie. The most spectacular (and dramatic) expression of this political emancipation was the Paris Commune of 1871. In the Commune, the proletariat for the first time held political power 'for two whole months' (as Marx and Engels wrote enthusiastically in the preface to the 1872 German edition of the *Manifesto*). Although defeated, the Paris Commune was hailed by Marx as exemplary of the future organization of the proletariat as the ruling class.

The close fit of the trends and events of 1848–1896 with the predictions of the *Manifesto* goes a long way towards explaining the hegemony that Marx and his followers established over the nascent European labour movement. Their success came only after protracted intellectual struggles over whether proletarianization was historically irreversible—and so formed the proper ground on which to carry forward the struggles of the present for the society of the future as theorized by Marx—or whether proletarians could historically recover their lost economic independence through one form or another of cooperative production. The latter view had been propounded in earlier periods by the Owenites in England and the Fourierists in

France but lived on in new and different forms among the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin in France, Belgium, Russia, Italy and Spain, and of Lassalle in Germany.

The First International was little more than a sounding board of this intellectual struggle which saw Marx on the side of British trade-unionists (the only real representatives of an actually existing industrial proletariat) against a mixed bag of revolutionary and reformist intellectuals (some of working-class extraction) from Continental Europe. Even though Marx pretty much ran the show, he never won a clear-cut victory and, when he did, the impact on the real movement was illusory. The moment of truth came with the Paris Commune. The conclusions that Marx drew from that experience (the need to constitute legal working-class parties in each country as the presupposition of socialist revolution) alienated, for opposite reasons, Continental revolutionaries and British trade-unionists alike, and the end of the International was sealed.<sup>7</sup>

### Towards a New International

Just as the First International was disintegrating with no winners and many losers around 1873, the mid-century phase of 'prosperity' turned into the late-century Great Depression, and the conditions were created both for the labour movement in its modern form to take off and for Marxists to establish hegemony over the movement. Intensifying competitive pressures widened and deepened processes of proletarianization and multiplied the occasions of conflict between labour and capital. Between 1873 and 1896, strike activity on an unprecedented scale developed in one country after the other, while working-class parties were being established throughout Europe along the lines recommended by Marx in 1871. By 1896 a new International, this time based on working-class parties with a broad unity of purpose, had become a reality.

The success of the *Manifesto* in predicting the broad contours for the subsequent fifty years was and is quite impressive. Yet, not all the relevant facts fitted into the Marxian scheme—most importantly, proletarian politics itself. For the only major attempt by the proletariat to constitute itself as the ruling class along the lines theorized by Marx, the Paris Commune, was almost completely unrelated to the kind of tendencies which, according to that theory, were supposed to bring about such a revolutionary takeover. It was not the outcome of structural factors (a strengthening of the proletariat, due to the advancement of industry, combined with its growing impoverishment, due to commodification) but mainly the result of political factors: the defeat of France by Prussia and the harsh conditions created by the war. That is to say, the proletariat attempted a political revolution not because of a growing contradiction between its increasing exploitation and its increasing power in production processes, but because the bourgeois state had proved to be incompetent in 'protecting'

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Abendroth, *A Short History of the European Working Class*, New York 1973.

French society in general, and the Parisian proletariat in particular, from or against another state.

It might be argued that defeat in war was only the detonator of structural contradictions which were the real, that is, deeper cause of the explosion. It is certainly true that where structural contradictions were most developed (in England, throughout the period under examination, in the United States, from the late 1870s onwards) the level of direct class warfare between labour and capital (as gauged, for example, by strike activity) was indeed much higher than elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> The problem is, however, that labour unrest in these countries showed no propensity whatsoever to turn into political revolution. If the British industrial proletariat (by far the most developed as a class in itself, and the most prone to strike activity, around 1871) had had the slightest propensity in this direction, its representatives in the First International would have taken a more positive attitude towards the Paris Commune than they actually did. Their negative attitude was in fact symptomatic of a major problem with the Marxian scheme, and probably played a role in inducing Marx to abandon his active involvement in labour politics.

The disjunction between direct and more roundabout forms of the class struggle was confirmed after the Paris Commune in a different way. As we have seen, the coming of the late-nineteenth-century Great Depression coincided with a major upsurge in strike activity (the most direct form of class struggle) and the formation of national working class parties (a roundabout form of class struggle). Even though these two tendencies seemed to validate the predictions of the *Manifesto*, their spatial separation could not be fitted easily into the Marxian scheme. The countries that were leading in strike activity (Britain and the USA) were the laggards in the formation of working-class parties, while the reverse was the case in Germany. Generally speaking, the formation of working-class parties seemed to have little to do with economic exploitation, working-class formation, and structural conflict between labour and capital. Rather, the main determinants seemed to be the actual and perceived centrality of the state in social and economic regulation, and the struggle for basic civil rights (rights to assembly and to vote in the first place) of and for the proletariat. In Germany, where the state was highly visible and a growing industrial proletariat was denied basic civil rights, the class struggle took the roundabout form of the organization of a working-class party. Only at the end of the Great Depression, above all in the subsequent A phase, did the class struggle take the form of a direct clash between labour and capital. In Britain and the USA, where the state was less centrally organized and the proletariat had already secured basic civil rights, the class struggle took the form of strike activity and trade-union formation, and only much later (in Britain) or never (in the USA) were attempts to form nationally significant working-class parties successful.

---

<sup>8</sup> All the statements of fact concerning labour unrest contained in this article are based on research conducted by the World Labor Research Working Group of the Fernand Braudel Center, State University of New York at Binghamton. The main findings of this research will be published in 1991 in a special issue of *Review*.

These differences will be further discussed in the next section. For now let us simply note that the history of the class struggle in the first fifty years after the publication of the *Manifesto* provided *both* strong evidence in support of its main predictions, *and* some food for thought on the validity of the relationship between class struggle and socialist revolution postulated by Marx and Engels. More specifically, the socio-economic formation of the industrial proletariat led to the development of structural forms of class struggle, but did not lead to the development of political, let alone politically revolutionary, tendencies within the proletariat. The attitude of the proletariat towards political power remained purely instrumental *unless*, as in Continental Europe, political conditions themselves (relations among states, and relations between states and their subjects) prompted a more direct, and if necessary revolutionary, participation in political activity. In the huge late-century advances of the labour movement (and of Marxism within it), these anomalies must have looked like details unworthy of much consideration. Moreover, it was still reasonable to expect that the invisible hand of the market would take care of national discrepancies, and make the labour movement of all countries converge towards a common pattern of struggle, consciousness and organization. As it turned out, what had been a minor anomaly became in the next half-century a major historical trend which split the labour movement into two opposite and antagonistic camps.

## II. Global Wars, Movement and Revolution

Between 1896 and 1948 the orderliness of world-market rule for political and social actors broke down, and Marx's expectation of ever more homogenized conditions of existence of the world proletariat went unfulfilled. Following nineteenth-century liberal ideology, Marx had assumed that the world market operated over the heads rather than through the hands of state actors. This proved to be a major misconception because the world market of his time was first and foremost an instrument of British rule over the expanded European state system. As such, its effectiveness rested on a particular distribution of power and wealth among a multiplicity of ruling groups whose continuing consent, or at least acquiescence, was essential to the continuation of British hegemony.

The Great Depression of 1873-1896 was both the high and the terminal point of world-market rule as instituted in the nineteenth century. A major aspect of the Depression was the arrival in Europe of massive and cheap overseas (and Russian) grain supplies. The main beneficiaries were the overseas suppliers (the US in the first place) and the hegemonic power itself, which was the main importer of overseas grain and controlled most of world commercial and financial intermediation. The main loser was Germany, whose rapidly rising wealth and power still relied heavily on the domestic production of grain and very little on the organization of world commerce and finance. Threatened by the new developments, the German ruling classes responded with a further build-up of their military-industrial complex in an attempt to displace or join Britain at the commanding heights of the

world-economy. The result was a generalized and open power struggle in the interstate system which took two world wars to resolve.

In the course of this struggle world-market rule was impaired and, during and after the First World War, suspended. The demise of world-market rule did not stop the 'advancement of industry' and the 'commodification of labour'—the two tendencies which, in the Marxian scheme, were supposed to generate a simultaneous increase in the social power and the mass misery of labour. On the contrary, global wars and their preparation were more powerful factors of industrial advancement and mass misery than market rule had ever been. But the demise of the world market meant that the social power and the mass misery of the world proletariat came to be distributed among its various segments far less evenly than they had been before.

Generally speaking, in the periods of war mobilization the size of the Active Industrial Army increased (both absolutely and relative to the size of the Reserve Army) in most locations of the world-economy—including countries not directly involved in the war. Moreover, the increasing 'industrialization of war' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had made the cooperation of industrial recruits as important as (if not more important than) the cooperation of military recruits in determining the outcome of war efforts. The social power of labour thus grew in step with the escalation of the power struggle in the interstate system.

But global wars also absorbed a growing amount of resources, while disrupting the networks of production and exchange through which resources were procured. As a consequence, the overall capabilities of the ruling classes to accommodate labour's demands decreased or did not rise as rapidly as the social power of labour. World wars thus created that combination of proletarian power and proletarian deprivation which, in the Marxian scheme, was supposed to bring about an intensification of the class struggle and the eventual demise of the rule of capital.

Both world wars did in fact generate global waves of class struggle. Overall strike activity declined in the opening years of the two wars only to escalate rapidly in their closing years. The resulting peaks in world labour unrest had no historical precedent, and have remained unmatched to this day. And each peak was associated with a major socialist revolution—in Russia and then in China. Though these waves of class struggle did not bring the rule of capital to an end, they did bring about fundamental changes in the way in which that rule was exercised. These changes proceeded along two radically different and divergent trajectories which correspond quite closely to the opposite stands taken by Bernstein and Lenin in the course of the so-called Revisionist Controversy.

In one of its final resolutions, the International Socialist Congress of 1896 predicted an imminent general crisis which would put the exercise of state power on the agenda of Socialist parties. It therefore impressed upon the proletariat of all countries 'the imperative necessity of

learning, as class-conscious citizens, how to administer the business of their respective countries for the common good.' In line with this resolution, it was decided that future congresses would be open only to representatives of organizations that worked to transform the capitalist order into a socialist order and were prepared to participate in legislative and parliamentary activities. All Anarchists were thereby excluded.

### Movement and Goal

The end of the old controversy between the followers of Marx and Bakunin marked the beginning of a new controversy among the followers of Marx themselves. While the goal of working towards the socialist transformation of the capitalist order was stated in terms sufficiently vague and ambiguous to suit all shades of opinion among Marx's followers, the very definition of a common political objective for the proletariat of all countries posed some fundamental theoretical and practical problems. Eduard Bernstein was the first to bring these problems out into the open.

Even though Bernstein has gone down in history as the Great Revisionist of Marxian thought, his declared revisionism was actually very mild, particularly in comparison with some of his 'orthodox' opponents. In line with the principles of *scientific* socialism, he sought validation/invalidation for Marx's theses of a secular increase in the social power of labour and of a simultaneous secular increase in its misery. And like Marx, he thought that the best guide to the future of the labour movement in Continental Europe in general and in Germany in particular was the past and present of the movement in Britain. He accordingly focused his attention on trends in the latter.

Starting from these premises, Bernstein found plenty of evidence in support of the first thesis but little in support of the second: not only had there been significant improvements in the standards of life and work of the industrial proletariat, but political democracy had been expanded and transformed from a tool of subordination into a tool of emancipation of the working classes. Writing at the end of the Great Depression of 1873-96 and at the beginning of the *belle époque* of European capitalism, he saw no reason why these trends should be reversed in the foreseeable future. The liberal organizations of modern society were there to stay, and were sufficiently flexible to accommodate an indefinite increase in the social power of labour. As in the past, all that was needed was 'organization and *energetic action*' (emphasis added, GA). A socialist revolution, in the sense of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, was neither necessary nor desirable.<sup>9</sup>

Bernstein summed up his position in the slogan 'The movement is everything, the goal nothing.' This sounded like a provocation to Marxist reformists and revolutionaries alike. It was in fact a reformist (Karl Kautsky) who led the onslaught against Bernstein's revisionism. Kautsky argued, essentially, that all economic and political gains of

---

<sup>9</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, New York 1986, pp. 163-64.

the proletariat were conjunctural, that a general crisis was inevitable and indeed in-the-making, and that in such a crisis the bourgeoisie would try to win back forcibly whatever economic and political concessions it had had to make previously to the proletariat. Under these circumstances, everything would be lost unless the proletariat and its organizations were prepared to seize and to hold, if necessary through politically revolutionary means, the commanding heights of the state and of the economy. Thus, although Kautsky retained all of Marx's ambiguities concerning the relationship between the present struggles of the proletariat (the 'movement' in Bernstein's slogan) and the ultimate objective of socialist revolution (the 'goal'), his position at this time was a short step away from the conclusion that the goal was everything and the movement nothing.

Kautsky himself never took this step. It was left to Lenin, who had sided with Kautsky against Bernstein, to carry Kautsky's argument to its logical conclusion. If only a socialist seizure of state power could save/expand all previous achievements of the movement, then the former had clear priority over the latter. It also followed that the achievements of the movement were deceptive. For one thing, they did not take into account the future losses that the movement, left to itself, would inevitably encounter. In addition, they only reflected one side of the proletarian condition. By adding new emphasis to the thesis of the 'labour aristocracy', Lenin implicitly dismissed Marx's view that the best guide to the future of the labour movement in Continental Europe and elsewhere was the present and the past of the labour movement in Britain. The increasing social power of labour in Britain was a local and short-term phenomenon connected with Britain's position at the commanding heights of the world economy. The present and the future of the proletariat of Continental Europe in general and of the Russian Empire in particular was one of increasing mass misery and continuing political oppression, notwithstanding the presence of highly energetic and well-organized labour movements.

Two conclusions followed. First, the achievements (or for that matter the failures) of proletarian movements created the wrong kind of perceptions among their leaderships and rank-and-file. Consciousness of the necessity and the possibility of socialist revolution could only develop outside the movements and had to be brought to them by a professional revolutionary vanguard. Second, the organizations of the movements had to be transformed into 'transmission belts' capable of conveying the commands of the revolutionary vanguards to the proletarian masses. In this theorization, the movement was truly nothing, mere means, the goal everything.

### A Contradictory Balance

Looking back at the actual evolution of the labour movement over the entire period 1896-1948, we find plenty of evidence validating either Lenin's or Bernstein's positions but very little validating the intermediate Kautskian position. It all depends where we look. Bernstein's prediction/prescription that organization and energetic action were sufficient to force/induce the ruling classes to accommodate economically

and politically the secular increase in the social power of labour associated with the advancement of industry captures the essence of the trajectory of the labour movements of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian worlds. Notwithstanding two world wars and a catastrophic world-economic crisis, which Bernstein failed to predict, the proletariat in these locations continued to experience an improvement in economic welfare and governmental representation commensurate to its increasingly important role in the system of social production.

The most spectacular advances occurred in Sweden and Australia. But the most significant advances from the point of view of the politics of the world-economy took place in Britain (the declining hegemonic power but still the dominant colonial power) and in the USA (the rising hegemonic power). A marginal and subordinate force in the national politics of both states in 1896, organized labour had become by 1948 the governing party of Britain and a decisive influence on the US government. All this was achieved precisely along the path predicted and prescribed by Bernstein—the path, that is, of energetic and well-organized movements capable of exploiting whatever opportunity arose to transform the increasing social power of labour into greater economic welfare and better political representation. In this context, the goal of socialist revolution never became an issue, and revolutionary vanguards of the proletariat found few followers.

Yet, 1896–1948 was also the period of the greatest successes of socialist revolution, the period when self-proclaimed revolutionary vanguards of the proletariat took control of the means of rule over almost half of Eurasia. Though different in many respects, the experiences of the proletariat in the Russian and former Chinese empires presented important analogies. Vigorous movements of protest (in 1905 in the Russian empire, in 1925–27 in China) had failed to improve the conditions of existence for the proletariat: increasing mass misery, rather than increasing social power, was its overwhelming experience. Moreover, the escalation of the interstate power struggle ('imperialism' in Lenin's theory of revolution) had further lessened the ability of the ruling classes to provide the proletariat with minimal protection.

Under these circumstances a vanguard of dedicated revolutionaries, trained in the scientific analysis of social events, trends and conjunctures, could take advantage of the disruption of national and world power networks to carry out successful socialist revolutions. The foundation of the power of this vanguard was the impoverishment of the increasingly extensive exploited masses, regardless of their precise class locations. For increasing mass misery transformed the vast majority of the population into actual or potential members of the Industrial Reserve Army and, at the same time, prevented whoever happened to be in the Active Industrial Army at any given time from developing a separate class identity from that of other subordinate groups and classes. In this context, the movements of protest that did develop within the transient and precarious condition of the wage-labour force provided neither an adequate foundation for a continuing movement, nor a direction to political action oriented towards



the socialist transformation of the existing social order. The ways and means of that transformation had indeed to be developed outside of, and often in opposition to, the spontaneous movements of protest of the proletarian masses.

The most striking feature of these divergent tendencies—the development of the social power of labour in some locations and of socialist revolution against mass misery in others—is that, taken together, they demonstrated the historical imperviousness of the industrial proletariat to socialist-revolutionary ideologies and practices. Where the social power of the industrial proletariat was significant and growing, socialist revolution had no constituency; and where socialist revolution had a constituency, the industrial proletariat had no social power. As we saw above, the negative correlation between the social power of labour and its socialist revolutionary predispositions had already appeared in embryonic form at the time of the Paris Commune, and it was probably the most important single cause of the disbanding of the First International. Faced with a choice, both theoretical and political, between a strong but reformist labour movement in Britain and a revolutionary but weak labour movement in France, Marx chose not to choose and left the issue up in the air.

### Fateful Choices

As Marxism turned into a political institution, against Marx's and Engels's original intentions, a choice had to be made, particularly in view of the fact that the disjunction between the social power and the revolutionary predispositions of the proletariat was increasing instead of decreasing. Bernstein posed the problem and chose to side with the social power of labour (the 'movement'); Lenin chose to side with the revolutionary predispositions that grew out of increasing mass misery (the 'goal', in Bernstein's antinomy); and Kautsky, like Marx thirty years earlier, chose not to choose. This indeed was his only legitimate claim to 'orthodoxy'.

This choice not to choose had disastrous political implications. Whereas Bernstein's choice was validated by the subsequent successes of labour movement in the Anglo-Saxon world and Scandinavia, and Lenin's choice by the subsequent successes of socialist revolution in the former Russian and Chinese empires, Kautsky's choice not to choose was invalidated as a political strategy by the subsequent successes of counter-revolution in Central and Southern Europe. For the rise of Fascism and National Socialism can be traced at least in part to the chronic inability of the relevant working-class organizations to choose between energetic reformist and energetic revolutionary action.

To be sure, this chronic inability to choose was related to the more complex social situation which labour organizations faced in these regions—a situation, that is, characterized by a combination of increasing social power of labour and of increasing mass misery rather than by the predominance of one or the other tendency. The contradiction was real and localized. This combination generated

within the industrial proletariat significant revolutionary predispositions alongside more reformist predispositions—a combination that left the leadership of the movement in a permanent dilemma. Kautsky's choice not to choose, and the impressive theoretical and political apparatus that backed it up, provided plenty of justifications for a leadership which, instead of tilting the balance in a specific direction, reflected passively the divisions that tore apart the movement and thus compounded political confusion and disorientation. 5

We shall never know whether a more energetic reformist or revolutionary action on the part of German Social Democracy would have made any difference to subsequent German and world history. But just as the historical responsibilities of German Social Democracy (or for that matter of Italian Socialism) in paving the way to National Socialism and Fascism should not be belittled, they should not be exaggerated either. For the hegemonic successes of reactionary elites in seizing power in countries as diverse as Germany, Japan and Italy had world-systemic as well as local causes. The world-systemic causes were the joint processes of disintegration of world-market rule and escalation of the interstate power struggle outlined at the beginning of this section. These processes put a premium on war-preparedness, which in the twentieth century had come to mean first and foremost expansion and modernization of military-industrial complexes, on the one hand, and an exclusive or privileged access to the world-economic resources required for that expansion and modernization, on the other hand. In states affected by a structural disequilibrium between an overgrown military-industrial apparatus and a narrow domestic economic base, revanchist ideologies had a strong appeal to all kinds of social groups, including non-negligible fractions of the industrial proletariat. 6

Under these circumstances, the political indeterminacy engendered by the contradictory predispositions of the industrial proletariat towards reform and revolution contributed to undermine the legitimacy of organized labour, regardless of its actual role in compounding the indeterminacy. Whatever its causes, the rise of National Socialism in Germany became the decisive event in precipitating a new round of generalized war and class struggle. It was in the course of this round that organized labour became a decisive political influence on the great powers of the Anglo-Saxon world and that the domain of socialist-revolutionary regimes came to include almost half of Eurasia. 7

It is important to note that this prodigious expansion of the political power of elected and self-appointed representatives of the industrial proletariat took place in the context of an almost complete disappearance of autonomous revolutionary predispositions on the part of the industrial proletariat itself. Nowhere during and after the Second World War did the industrial proletariat attempt to take state power into its own hands through 'communes' or 'soviets'—not even in defeated countries, as it had done in France in 1871, in Russia in 1917, in Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1919–1920. The expansion of the domain of socialist-revolutionary regimes was essentially due to 8

armies defeating other armies—a proletarian version of Gramsci's 'Piedmontese Function'.<sup>20</sup>

In Eastern Europe, Communist regimes were established by the Soviet Army, substantively if not formally. Elsewhere, as in Yugoslavia, Albania and, most importantly, China, Communist regimes were established by indigenous armies raised and controlled by revolutionary political elites and cadre who had taken the lead in the struggle of national liberation against Axis Powers. Even in Italy and France, where Communist parties won hegemony over significant fractions of the industrial proletariat, this hegemony was largely the result of previous leadership in the armed struggle against German Occupation. Rejected by the labour movement of core countries, socialist revolution found a new and highly responsive constituency in national liberation movements.

### III. US Hegemony and the Remaking of the World Labour Movement

In 1948 a simple extrapolation of the main social and political trends of the previous half-century pointed towards an imminent termination of the rule of capital. Each round of generalized war and class struggle had resulted in major advances of socialist revolution in the periphery and semiperiphery of the world-economy and in major advances in the social and political power of the industrial proletariat in core countries. Were the trends not reversed, the only question that remained open was not whether capitalism would survive but by what particular mix of reforms and revolutions it would die.

But the trends were reversed, and in the next twenty years capitalism experienced a new 'golden age' of unprecedented expansion. The single most important development was the pacification of interstate relations and the reconstruction of the world market under US hegemony. Up to 1968, the reconstruction of the world market remained partial and heavily dependent on US military and financial capabilities. Then, between 1968 and 1973, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the defeat of the US in Vietnam showed that these capabilities in and by themselves were no longer either sufficient or necessary for the ongoing process of world-market reconstruction. For it is precisely from 1973 onwards that the world market seems to have become within limits an 'autonomous force' that no one state (the US included) can control. In concert, states, corporations and administering agencies can, and do, construct and manage the limits of the world market, but not without difficulty and unintended consequences. As a matter of fact, it would seem that at no time in capitalist history has the rule of the world market *per se* approached Marx's limiting ideal type as much as it has in the last 15–20 years.

Today, the social foundations of the world market are quite different from what they were in the nineteenth century. At the end of the war,

---

<sup>20</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selecteds from the Prison Notebooks*, New York 1971, pp. 104–105

the US did not set out to re-establish the same kind of world market that had collapsed over the previous fifty years. Quite apart from the historical lessons of that collapse and the structural differences between nineteenth-century British capitalism and twentieth-century US capitalism to be discussed presently, the power and influence gained by organized labour in the US and Britain and the successes of socialist revolution in Eurasia made such a re-establishment neither feasible nor advisable. The most enlightened factions of the US ruling classes had long understood that no return to the strictly bourgeois order of the nineteenth century was possible. A new world order could not be built on the social power and aspirations of the world bourgeoisie alone; it also had to include as large a fraction of the world proletariat as, in their view, was possible.

A most important aspect of this strategy was US support for 'decolonization' and for an expansion/consolidation of the system of sovereign states. Like Wilson before him, Franklin D. Roosevelt implicitly shared Lenin's view that the struggle over territory and population among core capitalist states was a negative-sum game that created a favourable environment for socialist revolutions and the ultimate demise of the world rule of capital. If the tide of socialist revolution in Eurasia was to be stopped before it was too late, this struggle had to be brought to an end and the right to self-determination of the weaker fractions of the world bourgeoisie and of the world proletariat had to be acknowledged.

A secondary yet highly important objective of Roosevelt's world-hegemonic strategy was to accommodate the social power of labour at home and to expand it abroad. This policy had a number of advantages for the coalition of interests that had come to rule the US. From the point of view of corporate capital, it would create in Europe and elsewhere 'domestic' mass markets similar to the one already existing in the US and thus pave the way for its further transnational expansion. From the point of view of organized labour, it reduced the threat of competitive pressures originating in the lower standards of returns for effort obtaining almost everywhere else in the world. Last and most important, from the point of view of the government, a policy of accommodation at home and expansion abroad of the social power of labour meant that the US could present itself, and be widely perceived, as the bearer of the interests, not just of capital, but of labour as well. It was this policy, together with support for decolonization, that transformed US military and financial supremacy into a true world hegemony.<sup>11</sup>

American military and financial power thus became the vehicle through which the ideology and practice of the primacy of the movement over the goal, typical of the US labour movement, was exported as far as that power reached. The transplant was most successful in those defeated states (West Germany and Japan) where the US Army

---

<sup>11</sup> As this sentence implies, I use the term 'hegemony' in the Gramscian sense of a domination exercised through a combination of coercion and consent. See Gramsci, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

by itself or in collusion with its allies held absolute governmental power and, at the same time, industrialization had proceeded far enough to provide organized labour with a firm social base. Even where it was most successful, however, this restructuring of class relations from above by a foreign power would have come to nothing had it not been followed, as it was, by the reconstruction of world-market rule and a rapid spread of the structures of accumulation on which the social power of labour in the US rested.

In the previous section, the labour movement in the United States was dealt with as part of a wider Anglo-Saxon model in which the 'movement' had primacy over the 'goal'. Yet, in the interwar period it had come to exemplify better than the labour movement in any other country the social power that the accumulation of capital puts in the hands of labour. Elsewhere—particularly in the UK, Australia and Sweden—strong labour movements had found expression in the rise of Labour Parties, which remained under the control of the movement but could act as substitutes for and complements of the movement if and when the need arose. In the USA no such development had taken place. At most an existing party had become the principal political representation of organized labour. The movement went forward or foundered as its capabilities of self-mobilization and self-organization succeeded or failed.

### New Structures of Accumulation

These capabilities were the unintended consequence of the structural transformations undergone by US capital over the previous half-century. Also in this respect, the Great Depression of 1873–1896 had been a decisive turning point. It was in that period that US capital had created vertically-integrated, bureaucratically-managed structures of accumulation that corresponded to the full development of Marx's 'production of relative surplus value'.<sup>2</sup>

As painstakingly demonstrated by Harry Braverman, the creation of these structures of accumulation was associated with a shopfloor recomposition such that as the labour processes became more complex the skills required of each participant became fewer and less difficult to master (his 'de-skilling'). This reworking of the technical division of labour undermined the social power of the comparatively small class of wage-workers (primarily craftsmen) who controlled the skills necessary to perform the complex tasks. However, the decreasing social power of craftworkers was only one side of the coin. The other side was the greater social power that accrued to the comparatively much larger class of waged operatives who came to perform the simpler ('semi-skilled') tasks.

'De-skilling' was in fact a double-edged sword which eased the valorization of capital in one direction only to make it more problematic in

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, Cambridge, Mass. 1977, and Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, NLB, London 1979

another. The valorization of capital was eased because it was made less dependent on the knowledge and skills of craftworkers. But this was associated with a major expansion of managerial hierarchies (Galbraith's 'technostructures') whose valorization depended on the speed of production processes and, therefore, on the willingness of a large mass of operatives to cooperate with one another and with management in keeping production flows moving at the required speed. This greater importance of the productive effort of a large mass of operatives for the valorization of complex and expensive technostructures provided the social power of labour with a new and broader foundation.

This new and broader foundation became manifest for the first time in the course of the long wave of strikes and labour unrest that unfolded in the United States between the mid 1930s and the late 1940s. The strike wave began as a spontaneous response of the rank-and-file of the industrial proletariat to the attempts by capital to shift onto labour the burdens of the Great Slump of the early 1930s.<sup>13</sup> The main and indeed the only pre-existing organization of the industrial proletariat of any significance (the AFL) did nothing to initiate the strike wave. It became active in organizing and leading the movement only when the latter had proved capable of standing on its own and of generating alternative organizational structures, which became the CIO.

The struggles were most successful in the period of war mobilization which, as argued earlier on, tended to inflate the social power of labour. McCarthyism notwithstanding, most of the wartime gains were then consolidated in the period of de-mobilization, and for a decade or two the US industrial proletariat enjoyed unprecedented and unparalleled economic welfare and political influence. But the social power of labour in the US was also contained. The most effective forms of struggle were delegitimized, conflict was routinized, and the pace of corporate expansion abroad experienced a sudden acceleration.

The predisposition of US corporate capital to expand its operations transnationally long preceded the strike wave of the 1930s and 1940s. It was built into the processes of vertical integration and of bureaucratization of management which brought it into being in the late nineteenth century and constituted its essential form of expansion. In the 1930s and 1940s, however, the escalation of the interstate power struggle seriously hampered US direct investment in Europe and its colonies precisely at a time when the increasing social power of labour at home was making expansion abroad more profitable and urgent. It should be no surprise, therefore, that as soon as Washington had created conditions highly favourable for corporate expansion in Western Europe (primarily through the Marshall Plan), US capital

---

<sup>13</sup> A more exhaustive account of what follows in this section can be found in Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver, 'Labor Movements and Capital Migration: The United States and Western Europe in World Historical Perspective', in C. Bergquist, ed., *Labor in the Capitalist World-Economy*, Beverly Hills 1984.

seized the opportunity and set out to remake Europe in its image and to its likeness.

American corporate capital was not the only actor involved in this remaking of Europe. European governments and businesses joined eagerly in the enterprise, in part to catch up with the new standards of power and wealth set by the US and in part to meet the competition brought into their midst by the US corporate invasion. The result was an unprecedented expansion of production facilities which embodied the new structures of accumulation pioneered in the US in the first half of the century. With the new structures of accumulation came also a massive increase in the social power of European labour, signalled in the late 1960s and early 1970s by a strike wave that presented important analogies with the US of the 1930s and 1940s. First, this wave also was largely based on the capacity for self-mobilization and self-organization of the rank-and-file of the industrial proletariat. Pre-existing labour organizations, regardless of their ideological orientation, played no role in initiating the struggles and became involved in leading and organizing the militancy only when the latter had proved capable of standing on its own and of generating alternative organizational structures. Often, the new movements and labour organizations came into conflict with one another as the latter tried to impose on the former their own political objectives and the former struggled to retain its autonomy from objectives that transcended the proletarian condition.

Second, the foundation of the self-mobilization and self-organization of the industrial proletariat was wholly internal to the proletarian condition. Self-mobilization was a spontaneous and collective response to the attempts of capital to shift the intensifying competitive pressures of the world-economy onto labour by curtailing rewards for effort (primarily by demanding greater effort). And self-organization was the use of the technical organization of the labour process so as to coordinate scattered acts of insurgency.

Third, the movement was highly successful, not only in the pursuit of its immediate objectives, but in inducing the ruling classes to accommodate the social power demonstrated by labour in the struggles. Between 1968 and 1973, rewards for effort skyrocketed throughout Western Europe bringing them close to North American standards. At the same time or shortly afterwards, the formal or substantive restrictions on the civil and political rights of the industrial proletariat still in force in many Western European countries began to crumble.

### The Transnational Expansion

Finally, the accommodation of the social power of labour was slowed and then halted by re-orienting the expansion of production processes towards more peripheral locations. Up to 1968, the transnational expansion of production processes, as measured for example by direct investment abroad, was primarily a US-based phenomenon, while European-based counterparts were a residual of earlier colonial

operations and experiences. Capitalist enterprises originating in small and wealthy countries, such as Sweden and Switzerland, had also engaged in this kind of expansion but the enterprises of the larger and more dynamic core countries, such as Germany and Japan, were conspicuous by their absence in the construction of transnational networks of production and distribution.

Then, between 1968 and 1973, there occurred a sudden acceleration in direct foreign investment in which previous laggards, Japan in particular, played a leading role. By 1988 control over transnational production and distribution networks had become a common feature of core capital of all nationalities, with Japanese capital close to overtaking US capital in extent and scope. Japan's leadership in the sudden acceleration of direct foreign investment in the 1970s and 1980s has not been just a matter of exceptionally high rates of growth. Accompanying, and indeed underlying, these growth-rates was an anticipation of, and a prompt adjustment to, world-economic trends in labour-capital relations. As soon as domestic strike activity and labour costs began to rise, Japanese capital promptly relocated abroad the production processes that were most dependent on an ample supply of cheap labour. What is more, at least in its initial stages the transnational expansion of Japanese capital, unlike that of US capital, was oriented primarily towards a reduction in costs rather than an expansion of revenues.<sup>14</sup>

Japanese leadership in the transnational expansion of capital of the 1970s and 1980s was built on an anticipation of the difficulties created for the accumulation of capital by the generalization of the structures of corporate capitalism to the entire core zone. As long as corporate capitalism was almost exclusively a US phenomenon, US corporations could pick and choose among a wide range of locations where to seek the valorization of their managerial hierarchies. This lack of competition was the single most important reason why US corporate capital in the 1950s and most of the 1960s could simultaneously expand its productive base abroad and at home, accommodate the social power of labour that went with that expansion, and increase the mass of profit under its control. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the greatly expanded managerial hierarchies of US capital were no longer alone in seeking valorization outside their original domain. Western European and Japanese capitalist enterprises had developed the same kinds of capabilities and propensities, while the number of locations offering comparable opportunities of profitable expansion had decreased. Western Europe, which had been a prime location for the valorization of US capital externally, was itself seeking a profitable outlet for its own overgrown technostuctures. Opportunities for foreign direct investment in the rest of the world were narrowly constrained, either by centralized state controls over production and distribution (as in all Communist countries) or by mass misery (as in most Third World countries) or by a combination of the two.

The cost-cutting race of the 1970s and 1980s has its deeper roots in

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Terutomo Ozawa, *Multinationalism, Japanese Style. The Political Economy of Outward Dependency*, Princeton, N.J. 1979



this situation of overcrowding—that is, a situation in which too many corporate structures ‘chased’ too few locations offering profitable opportunities of expansion. In the 1970s, attempts by states and corporations to sustain the expansion of productive facilities and to accommodate the increasing social power of labour that went with it simply resulted in an accentuation of inflationary pressures. These pressures, in turn, enhanced the profitability of cost-cutting and the attractiveness of speculative activities which, in the 1980s, have accordingly drawn to them increasing monetary resources and entrepreneurial energies.

Financial speculation and cost-cutting activities are thus reflections of the growing inability of corporate capital to adjust to the increasing social power of labour that goes with corporate capital’s own expansion. Their main impact has been a limited but nonetheless very real spread of mass misery to the core zone. The phenomenon has taken different forms: falling real wages (primarily in the US), rising unemployment (primarily in Western Europe), and an increasing effort-price of proletarian incomes in almost all core locations.

This increase in mass misery has not been associated with a proportionate decrease in the social power of labour. Financial speculation reflects the emergence of an incompatibility between corporate expansion and the increasing social power of labour. It cannot stop the latter without stopping the former. Its main effect is to undermine the social consensus on which the rule of capital has rested since the Second World War.

### Cost-Cutting

As for cost-cutting activities, they have taken three main forms: (a) a substitution of cheaper for more expensive sources of wage-labour *within* each and every core state—the feminization of the waged labour force being the most important aspect, and the use of first-generation, often illegal, immigrant labour its secondary aspect; (b) a substitution of cheaper for more expensive sources of wage labour *across* state boundaries, particularly between core and more peripheral regions—plant relocation and substitution of imports for domestic production here being the most important aspects; and (c) a substitution of intellectual and scientific labour power for proletarian labour power in production processes—automation and the use of science-based technologies being its most important aspects.

The first two kinds of substitution have been by far the most important in spreading mass misery to the proletariat of core countries. Yet, neither of them involves a reduction in the overall social power of the world proletariat. What they do involve is a transfer of social power from one segment of the world proletariat to another segment. Substitution within core states transfers social power from male to female and from native to immigrant members of the industrial proletariat; and substitution across state boundaries transfers social power from the proletariat of one state to the proletariat of another state. Either way, social power changes hands but remains in the hands of the industrial proletariat.

Automation and science-based technologies, in contrast, involve a reduction in the social power of the proletariat as presently constituted. By transferring control over the quality and quantity of production from subordinate wage-workers to managers, intellectuals and scientists, this kind of substitution transfers social power from substantively proletarianized workers to workers who, at best, are proletarianized only in the formal sense of working for a wage or salary. However, the stronger this tendency and the larger the size of the managerial and scientific labour force in the overall economy of production processes, the stronger also the tendency for capital to subject this labour force to its rule, and thus make its proletarianization more substantive than it has been thus far. In this case, therefore, there is a transfer of social power out of the hands of the industrial proletariat, but only as a premise to a future enlargement of its size and power.

It follows that the deteriorating living standards of the proletariat in core countries have been associated not so much with a loss as with a redistribution of social power within its present and future ranks. Social power and mass misery are no longer as polarized in different segments of the world proletariat as they were in the middle of the twentieth century. Mass misery has begun to spread to the proletariat of the core, while social power has begun to trickle down to the proletariat of the periphery and semi-periphery. In short, we are approaching the scenario envisaged by Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto*—a scenario in which the social power and the mass misery of labour affect the same human material rather than different and separate segments of the world proletariat.

To be sure, social power and material deprivation are still distributed extremely unevenly among the various components of the world proletariat. Insofar as we can tell, such unevenness will remain for a long time to come. Yet, the tendency of the first half of the twentieth century towards a spatial polarization of the social power and mass misery of labour in different and separate regions of the world-economy has begun to be reversed. Between 1948 and 1968, the social power previously enjoyed almost exclusively by the industrial proletariat of the Anglo-Saxon world spread to the industrial proletariat of the entire core zone, which had come to include most of Western Europe and Japan, while mass misery continued to be the predominant experience of the proletarianized and semi-proletarianized masses of the Third World. From circa 1968, however, this polarization became counterproductive for the further expansion of corporate capital. In core regions, the enlarged social power of labour began to interfere seriously with the command of capital over production processes. In peripheral regions, the enlarged mass misery of labour undermined the legitimacy of the rule of capital, impoverished markets, and interfered with the productive mobilization of large segments of the proletariat.

Faced with these opposite and mutually reinforcing obstacles to its further expansion, corporate capital has been trying ever since to overcome its difficulties by bringing the mass misery of the proletariat of the semiperiphery and periphery of the world-economy to bear

upon the social power of labour in the core. The attempt has been eased by the ongoing reconstruction of the world market which, from 1968 onwards, has become increasingly independent of specifically US interests and power. This reflects, among other things, the ever widening and deepening transnational organization of production and distribution processes through which corporate capital regardless of nationality has been trying to bypass, contain and undermine the social power of labour in the core.

### Reshuffling of the Proletariat

The result has been a major reshuffling of the human material that constitutes the Active and Reserve Industrial Armies. In comparison with twenty years ago, a far larger proportion of the world Active Industrial Army is now located in periphery and semiperiphery of the world-economy, while the Active Army in the core contains a large number of female and immigrant recruits in its lower ranks and of formally proletarianized intellectuals and scientists in its upper ranks. This reshuffling has put considerable pressure on the native male workers of the core employed in the lower and middle ranks of the Active Army to accept lower standards of reward for effort or else be squeezed out of the Active Army.

Resistance against this deterioration of living standards in the core has thus far been rather weak and ineffectual mainly because the segments of the industrial proletariat that have experienced it most directly have also been affected by a loss of social power, while the segments that have been gaining social power have not yet experienced a major deterioration in living standards. In the case of the women and immigrants that have come to occupy the lower ranks of the industrial proletariat, two circumstances have softened the impact of the deterioration. On the one hand, standards of reward for effort in their previous occupations were in many instances even lower than the standards obtaining in the lower ranks of the Active Industrial Army to which they have been recruited. On the other hand, often they still consider their rewards as a supplement to other sources of income and their efforts as temporary additions to their usual workload. Low rewards for effort are thus borne with greater patience than, one would imagine, they would be if rewards were perceived as the sole or principal source of income and if the efforts were perceived as a permanent addition to their workload.

Both circumstances are inherently transitory. Over time, standards of rewards for effort are formed by present rather than past conditions. In addition, the more widespread becomes the use of female and immigrant labour in the lower ranks of the Active Industrial Army, the more low rewards turn into the main source of income and high effort turns into a lifetime condition. As this happens, acquiescence gives way to open rebellion in which the social power of women and immigrants is turned against the rising tide of mass misery in the core. Even in the 1970s and 1980s women and immigrants in core states have shown a strong predisposition to rebel and make use of their social power; but we have yet to see a major wave of industrial

conflict focused specifically on their grievances. If and when it occurs, this kind of wave will interact positively and negatively with movements of protest originating in the upper ranks of the Active Industrial Army.

These upper ranks are increasingly occupied by intellectuals and scientists who are taking over an ever widening range of productive tasks. For now, they are the main beneficiaries of the ongoing cost-cutting race which inflates the demand for their labour power and provides them with comparatively inexpensive luxuries. But the more their weight in the cost structure of capital increases, the more they will be targeted as the main object of the cost-cutting race. At that point, these upper strata of the Active Industrial Army can also be expected to mobilize their social power in movements of protest to prevent mass misery from spreading to their own ranks.

These are the movements of the future of the core. But in the semi-periphery the future has already begun. The 1980s have witnessed major explosions of labour unrest in countries as far apart as Poland, South Africa and South Korea—just to mention the most significant cases. Notwithstanding the radically different political regimes and social structures, these explosions present important common features, some of which resemble those attributed earlier to the waves of class struggle of the 1930s and 1940s in the US and of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Western Europe. In all instances, industrial conflict has been largely based on the capabilities of self-mobilization and self-organization of the rank-and-file of the industrial proletariat. The foundation of these capabilities has been wholly internal to the proletarian condition and has consisted of a fundamental disequilibrium between the new social power and the old mass misery of the industrial proletariat.

The resemblances in these respects are striking. Nevertheless, the differences between this latest wave and the earlier waves have been as significant as the similarities. These movements have been as hard to repress as the earlier ones; but they have been far more difficult to accommodate. The reason lies not in the grievances themselves, which are far more basic than the grievances of the earlier waves, but in the limited capabilities of states and capital in the semiperiphery to adjust to even the most basic of grievances. The result might well be a situation of endemic social strife of the kind envisaged by Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto*.

#### IV. The Crisis of Marxism in World-historical Perspective

The argument that the predictions of the *Manifesto* concerning the world labour movement might be more relevant for the next 50–60 years than they have been for the last 90–100 years may seem to be contradicted by the current crisis of organized labour and Marxist organizations. There is no denying that over the last 15–20 years labour unions, working-class parties and states ruled by socialist

governments, particularly of the Communist variety, have all been under considerable pressure to restructure themselves and change their orientation or face decline. This pressure, however, is not at all incompatible with the argument developed here. On the contrary, it provides further evidence in its support.

Like all other social organizations, proletarian organizations (whether Marxist or not) pursue strategies and have structures that reflect the historical circumstances under which they have come into existence, and most continue to retain the same sort of strategy and structure long after the circumstances of their origin are over with. The proletarian ideologies and organizations that are now under pressure to change or face decline all reflect the historical circumstances typical of the first half of the twentieth century—a period in which the capitalist world-economy departed in fundamental ways from the scenario sketched in the *Manifesto*. To the extent that the capitalist world-economy once again begins to match more closely that scenario, it is only to be expected that all organizations whose strategies and structures reflect the historical circumstances of a previous epoch would be challenged fundamentally and be faced with the prospect of decline. Some may be able to stave off the decline, even prosper, through a simple change in strategy. Others can attain the same result but only through a process of thorough self-restructuring. And others again can only decline, no matter what they do.

More specifically, Marx had assumed that market rule would constantly reshuffle within and across the various locations of the capitalist world-economy the increasing social power and the increasing mass misery of labour. In actual fact, for a long time this did not happen. In the first half of the twentieth century the escalation of the interstate power struggle first impaired and then totally disrupted the operation of the world market. The social power and the mass misery of labour increased faster than ever before but in polarized fashion, with the proletariat in some regions experiencing primarily an increase in social power, and the proletariat in other regions experiencing primarily an increase in mass misery. As Marx had predicted, this accentuation of the tendencies towards an increasing social power and an increasing mass misery of labour gave a tremendous impulse to the spread of proletarian struggles, ideologies and organizations. But the polarized fashion in which the two tendencies materialized made proletarian struggles, ideologies and organizations develop along trajectories which Marx had neither predicted nor advocated.

The assumption that the two tendencies would affect the same human material across the space of the capitalist world-economy was an essential ingredient in Marx's theory of the socialist transformation of the world. Only under this assumption would the everyday struggles of the world proletariat be inherently revolutionary, in the sense that they would bring to bear on states and capital a social power which the latter could neither repress nor accommodate. Socialist revolution was the long-term, large-scale process whereby the ensemble of these struggles would force upon the world bourgeoisie an order based on consensus and cooperation instead of coercion and competition.

Within this process the role of revolutionary vanguards, if any, was supposed to be moral and educational rather than political. According to the *Manifesto*, truly revolutionary vanguards ('communists') were not supposed to form separate parties opposed to other working-class parties; they were not supposed to develop interests of their own separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole; and they were not supposed to set up sectarian principles by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement. Rather, they were supposed to limit themselves to express and represent *within* proletarian struggles the common interests of the entire world proletariat and of the movement as a whole (see the passage quoted above). The most striking fact about this list of what revolutionary vanguards were not supposed to do is that it is a list of what Marxists actually did do in becoming collective historical agents.

The formation at the end of the nineteenth century of separate parties competing with and often opposed to other working-class parties was the first thing that Marxists did. As a matter of fact, this formation of separate political parties marks the very act of birth of Marxism as effective historical agency and shared ideological identity. Soon thereafter, the Revisionist Controversy purged Marxism of the idea that the movement of concrete proletarian struggles had primacy over the principles (socialist or not) set up by revolutionary vanguards. This development was a tacit invitation to set up particular principles as criteria of proletarianism and, hence, as working guidelines for a vanguard's shaping and moulding of actual proletarian movements—something that happened right away. When one version of this path brought to Marxism its first territorial base (the Russian Empire), the Leninist theory of supremacy of the revolutionary vanguard over the movement became the core of Marxist orthodoxy.

Finally, having acquired a territorial domain, Marxism as an orthodoxy developed interests of its own—interests not necessarily nor evidently coincident with those imputable to the world proletariat. The internecine struggles that followed the seizure of state power in the Russian empire redefined Marxism as coercive rule (of the party over the state and of the state over civil society); the aim was not so much to achieve proletarian liberation as such as to keep up or catch up with the wealth and power of the core states of the capitalist world-economy. This strategy turned the USSR into a superpower and helped bring about a phenomenal expansion of the territorial domain of Marxist rule. Coercive rule plus industrialization became the new core of orthodoxy.

### Party, State and Class

Notwithstanding this progressive negation of Marx's legacy, Marxism continued to claim representation of the common interests of the entire world proletariat and world labour movement. This claim, however, was increasingly emptied of substance by a constant redefinition of the common interests of the world proletariat to match the power interests of Marxist organizations (states, parties, unions). Right from the start, the common interests of the world proletariat

were redefined, one, to exclude the material interests of those segments of the world proletariat (so-called 'labour aristocracies') that rejected the necessary role of Marxist parties in the pursuit of their emancipation and, two, to include the power interests of Marxist organizations regardless of their participation in actual proletarian struggles. Then, as Marxist organizations came to include the USSR, the common interests of the world proletariat were redefined to give priority to the consolidation of Marxist power in the USSR and of the USSR in the state system. Finally, as the USSR became a superpower engaged in a struggle for world-hegemony with the USA, the common interests of the world proletariat were redefined once again to match the interests of the USSR in that struggle.

This trajectory of successive and cumulative negations of Marx's legacy by individuals, groups and organizations who, nonetheless, continued to claim allegiance to that legacy, does not describe a 'betrayal' of Marxism, whatever that might mean. Rather, it describes Marxism for what it is, a historical formation that conforms to the actual unfolding of the Marxian legacy under circumstances unforeseen by that legacy. Or to rephrase, Marxism was made by *bona fide* followers of Marx but under historical circumstances that were neither prefigured for them nor of their own making.

The escalation of the interstate power struggle and the concomitant breakdown of world-market rule imposed upon Marx's followers the historical necessity of choosing between alternative strategies which for Marx were not alternatives at all. As argued in section 11 above, the choice in question was to develop organic links either with the segments of the world proletariat that experienced most directly and systematically the tendency towards increasing mass misery, or with the segments of the world proletariat that experienced most directly and systematically the tendency towards increasing social power. The choice was imposed by the increasing division of the two tendencies over the space of the world-economy. Marx thought, and hoped, that this division, already observable in embryonic form in his own days, would decrease over time. Instead, the escalation of the interstate power struggle strengthened both tendencies and increased their spatial division. Hence, the necessity to choose, and to choose promptly.

When Bernstein raised this issue and proposed to develop organic links with the stronger segments of the world proletariat, Marxists almost unanimously rejected his proposal, regardless of their revolutionary or reformist predispositions. The actual reasons for this almost unanimous rejection, which set the course of Marxism for decades to come, fall beyond the scope of this essay. All we need to point out is that they can be imputed to motivations that in no way contradict the letter and the spirit of the Marxian legacy.

Organic links with the weaker rather than the stronger fractions of the world proletariat presented a double advantage for Marxists. First, it appealed to their sense of moral outrage at the mass misery of the world proletariat, which no doubt had been a major motivation for many of them to follow in Marx's footsteps. Second, it appealed to

their sense of self-esteem—the sense, that is, that there was something they could personally do to overcome the mass misery of the world proletariat, which no doubt also played a role in inducing them to engage in working-class politics.

Bernstein's choice was disadvantageous from both points of view. If the accumulation of capital provided the proletariat with the social power necessary to stave off mass misery, Marxists—or at least most of them—were left without motivation or function: moral outrage was unjustified because mass misery was a passing phenomenon, and self-esteem was out of place because the proletariat had all the power it needed to emancipate itself. It is plausible to assume that this was an unstated but important reason why Bernstein's 'choice' was rejected and historical Marxism was constituted both theoretically and practically on the foundation of the increasing mass misery of labour rather than on its increasing social power.

### A Double Substitution

Whatever the motivations, this was a fateful decision, not just for Marxism, but for the world proletariat, the world labour movement, and the capitalist world system. It imposed on Marxists a double substitution which greatly enhanced their power to transform the world but also made them depart more and more radically from the letter and spirit of the Marxian legacy. At first, it imposed on Marxists the historical necessity of substituting organizations of their own making for the mass organizations that reflected the spontaneous acts of revolt of the proletariat and other subordinate groups and classes. Then, once in power, it imposed on Marxist organizations the historical necessity of substituting themselves for the organizations of the bourgeoisie and other dominant groups and classes in performing the unpleasant governmental tasks which the latter had been unable or unwilling to do.

The two substitutions (the first primarily associated with the name of Lenin, and the second with the name of Stalin) complemented each other in the sense that the first prepared the second and the second brought to completion, as best the actors could, the work initiated by the first. But whatever their mutual relations, both substitutions were rooted in the previous decision of Marxists to choose as the social foundation of revolutionary theory and action the increasing mass misery rather than the increasing social power of labour. Increasing mass misery was a necessary condition for the success of Lenin's strategy of the revolutionary seizure of power. But as soon as state power had been seized, mass misery turned into a serious constraint on what Lenin and his successors could do with that power.

The inability or unwillingness of previous ruling classes to provide basic protection (military protection in the first place) to the proletariat and other subordinate groups and classes in a situation of escalating interstate violence had been the primary factor of their downfall. Marxist organizations could thus hope to stay in power only by providing the proletariat and other subordinate groups and classes with



better protection than that provided by previous ruling groups. In practice, this meant—or so it seemed to all actors involved in the consolidation of Marxist power—catching up or at least keeping up with the military-industrial complexes of the great powers of the state system.

The alleviation of mass misery was accordingly subordinated to the pursuit of this objective. Since military-industrial backwardness had been a major, if not the major, cause of the increasing mass misery of the proletariat in the Russian Empire, it seemed quite reasonable to those involved in the consolidation of Marxist power in the USSR to assume that the alleviation of mass misery itself would begin with heavy industrialization. This assumption, however, did not seem so reasonable to a large number of Soviet subjects (including a great variety of proletarian subjects) whose ways of life were disrupted by the stepping up of heavy industrialization under conditions of mass misery. Given this opposition, coercive rule became the necessary complement of heavy industrialization.

The success of the USSR in becoming one of the two superpowers of the interstate system and, at the same time, in actually alleviating the chronic mass misery of its proletarian subjects turned coercive rule plus industrialization into the new core of Marxist theory and practice. Marxism thereby became even more closely identified than before with the mass misery of the world proletariat, and thereby enhanced its hegemonic capabilities in the periphery and semi-periphery of the world-economy. But, for that very reason, it lost most if not all of its residual appeal for those segments of the world proletariat whose predominant experience was not increasing mass misery but increasing social power.

The rejection of Marxism by the proletariat of core countries and the suppression of actual proletarian struggles in the theory and practice of historical Marxism went hand in hand. The more historical Marxism came to be identified with increasing mass misery and with the bloody struggles through which Marxist organizations attempted to overcome the powerlessness that went with mass misery, the more it became alien, nay, repugnant to the proletarians of core countries. And, conversely, the more proletarian organizations based on the increasing social power of labour in core countries succeeded in obtaining a share of the power and wealth of their respective states, the more they came to be perceived and presented by Marxists as subordinate and corrupt members of the dominant social bloc that ruled the world.

This mutual antagonism was a historical development which no one had willed or, for that matter, anticipated. Once in place, however, it provided the world bourgeoisie with a valuable ideological weapon in the struggle to reconstitute its tottering rule. As we have seen, US hegemony after the Second World War relied heavily on the claim that the experience of the US proletariat could be duplicated on a world scale. Let the expansion of corporate capitalism proceed unfettered—it was claimed—and the entire world proletariat will experience sufficient social power to eliminate mass misery from its ranks.

## American and World Labour

As we now know, this claim (like all hegemonic claims) was half true and half fraudulent. As promised, the global expansion of corporate capitalism, which followed from and secured the establishment of US hegemony, did in fact spread the social power of labour to the entire core, most of the semiperiphery, and parts of the periphery of the world-economy. And, as promised, the segment of the world proletariat with sufficient social power in its hands to stave off mass misery has expanded, if not in relative terms, certainly in absolute terms.

But the claim that the world labour movement could be remade in the image of the United States has turned out to be also half fraudulent. The increase in the social power of labour has not resulted in a proportionate decrease in the mass misery of labour, as happened in the US. The more corporate capitalism expanded, the less capable it became of accommodating all the social power that its own expansion put in the hands of labour. As a consequence, expansion has slowed down and the cost-cutting race of the 1970s and 1980s has set in.

The unraveling of the fraudulent aspects of US hegemony has been a major factor in precipitating its crisis in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet, neither organized labour nor Marxist organizations have been able to take advantage of the new situation. On the contrary, both have been affected by a crisis as structural as that of US hegemony.

The previous strength of organized labour in core countries was rooted in a situation in which a particular segment of the proletariat had considerable social power while states and capital had the capability of accommodating that power. Organized labour, as presently constituted, developed and expanded by delivering social peace to states and capital and greater returns for effort to its proletarian constituencies. The ongoing cost-cutting race, however, has made states and capital more reluctant or less capable to grant labour greater returns for effort and has transferred social power into the hands of proletarian segments (women, immigrants, foreign workers, etc.) with whom existing labour organizations have weak or no organic links. Organized labour has thus lost its previous social function or its social base or both.

The strength of Marxist organizations, in contrast, was rooted in a situation in which their proletarian constituencies had little social power and in which states and capital were incapable of providing such constituencies with minimal protection. Marxist organizations, as presently constituted, grew on the basis of their capacity to provide such constituencies with a better protection than previous ruling classes had been able or willing to provide. However, the strategy of keeping up and catching up with the most powerful military-industrial complexes of the interstate system, through which Marxist organizations consolidated and expanded their power, was vitiated by a fundamental contradiction.

On the one hand, this strategy required that, wittingly or unwittingly,

Marxist organizations put in the hands of their proletarian constituencies a social power comparable to the social power enjoyed by the proletariat of the core. Over time, this increasing social power was bound to interfere with the capability of Marxist organizations to pursue interests of their own at the expense of their proletarian constituencies. The longer they waited to adjust their strategies and structure to the increasing social power of their proletarian constituencies, the more serious the subsequent adjustment would have to be.

The reconstruction of world-market rule under US hegemony has aggravated this contradiction in more than one way. Interstate relations came to be pacified and war as a means of territorial expansion was delegitimated. This change undermined the capacity of Marxist organizations to mobilize consent among their proletarian constituencies for a strategy of coercive industrialization. In the situation of generalized preparation for war and of actual war in the 1930s and 1940s, this strategy probably reflected a genuine and deeply felt proletarian interest. But with the establishment of US hegemony it came more and more to reflect the self-serving interests of Marxist organizations and of their political clienteles. At the same time, the growing division of labour in the rest of the world-economy associated with the reconstruction of market rule heightened the comparative disadvantage of coercive industrialization in the race to keep up with the standards of power and wealth set by core capitalist states. As a consequence, Marxist states became increasingly incapable of keeping up with those standards or of adjusting to the increasing social power of their proletarian subjects or both.

### The Shape of the Crisis

The crises of organized labour and of Marxist organizations are thus two sides of the same coin. The crisis of organized labour is due primarily to its structural inability to stop the spread of mass misery to the proletariat of the core, while the crisis of Marxist organizations is due primarily to their structural inability to prevent the spread of social power to their actual or prospective proletarian constituencies. But the crisis is the same because each kind of proletarian organization is ill equipped to cope with a situation in which labour has greater social power than existing economic and political institutions can accommodate.

Under these circumstances, the old opposition between the 'movement' and the 'goal', which underlay the dual development of the world labour movement in the course of the twentieth century, no longer makes any sense to the protagonists of the struggles. As Marx had theorized, the simple exercise of the social power that has accumulated or is accumulating in the hands of labour is in and by itself a revolutionary act. An increasing number of proletarian struggles since 1968 have demonstrated the incipient recomposition of 'movement' and 'goal'.

The recomposition was presaged and explicitly advocated in the slogan *'praticare l'obiettivo'* ('putting the objective into practice') coined

by Italian workers at the height of the struggles of the late 1960s. Under this slogan, various practices of direct action were carried out. Even though practices of direct action were nothing new, their socially revolutionary effects were. The social power deployed in and through these struggles imposed a major restructuring of economic and political institutions, including Marxist and non-Marxist working-class organizations, to accommodate the democratic and egalitarian thrust of the movement.<sup>5</sup>

More compelling evidence of an incipient recomposition of 'movement' and 'goal' has come from Spain in the 1970s and from South Africa and Poland in the 1980s. In Spain, a persistent and long-drawn-out movement of proletarian struggles, which the Franco dictatorship could neither repress nor accommodate, was the single most important factor in the demise of that dictatorship and the subsequent rise of social democracy. In less clear-cut fashion, the same pattern can be identified in the later crises of dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina and South Korea. It can also be recognized in the ongoing struggles of the proletariat in South Africa and Poland. In these two cases, however, the labour movement presents specificities which enhance their significance.

The special significance of the labour movement in Poland is that it is emblematic of the contradictions and current crisis of historical Marxism as ideology and organization of the proletariat. The movement is based primarily, if not exclusively, on the social power that has been put in the hands of labour by the strategy of coercive industrialization pursued by Marxist organizations. The deployment of this social power in the pursuit of livelihood and basic civil rights is as inherently subversive of existing political and economic relations in Poland as it is or has been in all the other countries mentioned above. No distinction between the goal of social revolution and the actual unfolding of the movement is necessary or indeed possible—as witnessed, among other things, by the kind of leadership and organization which the movement has generated.

The irony of the situation is that, in struggling against a Marxist organization, knowingly or unknowingly *Solidarność* has followed Marx's prescriptions for revolutionary vanguards more closely than any Marxist organization ever did. It has restrained itself, (1) from forming a political party opposed to existing working-class parties; (2) from developing interests of its own separate from those of the world proletariat; and (3) from setting up sectarian principles by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement. Moreover, as advocated by Marx, its function has been more moral than political, though its political implications have been truly revolutionary.

The fact that a Marxist organization is the stage counterpart to this most Marxian of proletarian organizations should not surprise us.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ida Regalia, Marino Regini, Emilio Reyneri, 'Labor Conflicts and Industrial Relations in Italy', in C. Crouch and A. Pizzorno, eds., *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968*, vol. 1, New York 1978.

Indeed, the *Solidarnosc* experience provides vivid evidence in support of the two main theses of this essay: the thesis that Marx's predictions and prescriptions are becoming increasingly relevant for the present and the future of the world labour movement; and the thesis that historical Marxism has developed in a direction that in key respects is antithetical to the one foreseen and advocated by Marx.

But by bringing to the fore the role of religion and nationality in the formation of a distinctive but collective proletarian identity, the *Solidarnosc* experience does more than that. Together with other contemporary proletarian struggles—the South African experience in the first place—it warns us against excessive reliance on the Marxian scheme in charting the future of the labour movement. For in one major respect the Marxian scheme itself remains seriously defective—namely, in the way in which it deals with the role of age, sex, race, nationality, religion and other natural and historical specificities in shaping the social identity of the world proletariat. Consideration of such complex issues lies beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>25</sup> But their importance for the future of the world labour movement forces me to mention them by way of qualification and conclusion of what has been said so far.

To be sure, the cost-cutting race of the last 15–20 years has provided new and compelling evidence in support of the observation that *for capital* all members of the proletariat are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use according to their age, sex, colour, nationality, religion, etc. However, it has also shown that one cannot infer, as Marx does, from this predisposition of capital a predisposition of labour to relinquish natural and historical differences as means of affirming, individually and collectively, a distinctive social identity.

Whenever faced with the predisposition of capital to treat labour as an undifferentiated mass with no individuality other than a differential capability to augment the value of capital, proletarians have rebelled. Almost invariably they have seized upon or created anew whatever combination of distinctive traits (age, sex, colour, assorted geo-historical specificities) they could use to impose on capital some kind of special treatment. As a consequence, patriarchy, racism and national-chauvinism have been integral to the making of the world labour movement along both of its twentieth-century trajectories, and live on in one form or another in most proletarian ideologies and organizations.

As always, the undoing of these practices, and of the ideologies and organizations in which they have been institutionalized, can only be the result of the struggles of those who are oppressed by them. The social power which the cost-cutting race is putting in the hands of traditionally weak segments of the world proletariat is but a prelude to these struggles. To the extent that these struggles succeed, the stage will be set for the socialist transformation of the world.

---

<sup>25</sup> But see Arrighi, Hopkins, Wallerstein, *Anti-Systemic Movements*, Verso, London 1989.

## **Women and perestroika**

by Chanie Rosenberg

The position of women in Russia today offers a touchstone by which we can judge what perestroika offers ordinary working people. This analysis is based on the wealth of new information revealed in the past year. £3.95 / US\$6.50

## **State capitalism in Russia**

by Tony Cliff

Socialist? Communist? Stalinist? Now the logjam of Eastern Europe is broken, the nature of Russian society is a question more vital than ever. This classic analysis now includes a chapter on the years from Stalin to Gorbachev. £5.95 / US\$11.00

## **Class struggles in Eastern Europe 1945-83**

by Chris Harman

Today the workers venture on to the political stage in Eastern Europe. They have been there before: this book looks at earlier struggles ranging from East Germany in 1953 to Poland in 1980-81. It reveals a dynamic with important implications for the future of today's struggles. £7.95 / US\$13.50

## **Festival of the oppressed**

by Colin Barker

If today's workers' movements are to avoid the fate of Solidarity in Poland in 1981 they must learn from its mistakes. This book shows vividly its successes and its failures. £4.25 / US\$8.50

## **The market or democracy?**

Boris Kagaritsky takes on the Russian advocates of the free market in the latest *International Socialism* journal: issue 2:45. Other articles in this issue include Sheila McGregor on Rape, pornography and capitalism, and Chris Harman on the origins of the capitalist mode of production. £2.50 / US\$4.00

All titles are available from good bookshops; also by mail order (please add 60p / \$1.00 per title for postage) from:

### **Bookmarks London**

265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE, England. Phone 01-802 6145.

### **Bookmarks Chicago**

PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616, USA. Phone 312-666-7337.



**BOOKS  
ON  
EASTERN  
EUROPE  
Winter  
1990**

## *interview*

Zhores Medvedev

### *Soviet Power Today*

*I would like to begin by asking you about Gorbachev's political development. Whatever happens in the future, he has become someone considerably more important in the history of the Soviet Union, and the history of the world, than Khrushchev. When did this qualitative change in his role take place? When did he become radicalized and why?*

I have been thinking about this quite a lot because I wrote a book about him which needed updating. I found that his radicalization started at the end of 1986, when preparations were underway for the Central Committee Plenum on problems of ideology and leadership. At this time the conflict was growing sharper between the conservatives and the liberal or democratic wing, and the plenum was actually postponed three times because Gorbachev's report was more radical than the Central Committee was prepared to accept. A number of specific measures during this period had a kind of spontaneous character: in the case of Sakharov, for instance, Gorbachev seems to have acted over the heads of the KGB and taken a

personal initiative to secure his release from exile in response to requests from the Academy of Science and cultural organizations that were suffering from an American boycott. When the plenum finally took place in January 1987, Gorbachev had to compromise, but at least it decided to lift censorship from the general media. Shelved novels like Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat* were cleared for publication, and the press started to take on a quite different character. If we take the example of Chernobyl, the press had been full of stories of heroism throughout 1986, but in 1987 material began to emerge which showed all this in a very different light. As glasnost started to become a reality, it affected Gorbachev himself, because he was not a person who knew everything. On the other hand, conservative forces continued to put up strong resistance in 1987, including attempts to block various publications. The Yeltsin affair was a good indicator that there was trouble within the party leadership. Gorbachev's report on the 70th anniversary of the October revolution, together with his book *Perestroika*, were more or less traditional ways of trying to compromise between different groups. But then the very poor performance of the economy in 1987 seemed to necessitate a series of reforms which Gorbachev expected to come into effect early in 1988. After several postponements Bukharin and other major figures were finally rehabilitated. And then there was the difficult decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, which only happened after the removal of Sokolov and other military leaders and the appointment of the relatively young and unknown Yazov as Minister of Defence. So I think we can say that '87 was important for the beginning of glasnost, and '88 saw the start of real economic and political reform. Gorbachev made a large number of discrete changes before he became truly radical.

*Would you say that the Party Conference in June 1988 marked a new stage?*

Yes, that's right, although things were not all that clear at the time. The conference itself had a definite air of caution because it was convened according to the old rules: a complete process of indirect election or selection gave advantages to the conservatives, who formed the great bulk of delegates from the provinces if not from Moscow and Leningrad. However, this conservative majority didn't have any thought-out programme, so Gorbachev was able to get through his reorganization of the party or state system and the proposals for election of a People's Congress.

*Was it really understood at the time that such an election could result in the defeat of many officials?*

No, no, it was entirely unexpected, even by Gorbachev. Under the new system, a preliminary sorting took place at district level where there were often ten or twelve nominations and the election committee was able to refuse some nominations and accept others—few districts had more than two candidates, and about a fifth had only one. The second safeguard was the election of the Supreme Soviet by the Congress of People's Deputies as a whole. The final insurance was a bloc of seats to be filled by nomination of the party or of various other official bodies or associations more or less controlled by the



party. Most members of the Politburo and Central Committee, and many other key figures, were elected through the party to safe seats, in the Congress, and later to the Supreme Soviet.

*How, then, do we explain that a hundred official candidates, and I think thirty-eight regional Party secretaries, failed to be elected?*

This is an interesting story, which has a lot to do with the fact that the new system made it possible for people to take part in a genuinely secret ballot. Previously the ballot box would be situated just in front of the election committee, so that voters who did not have anything against the candidate—there was only one—were expected just to put the ballot paper into the box. There were some booths on the other side of the room, but the only reason for using them would have been to strike out the candidate's name. So in effect there was nothing secret about the way in which people voted. In last year's election, however, since there were often two or three candidates, people could not vote simply by placing the ballot paper in the box but had to use the private booth provided. About five hundred districts had only one name, but even there people still had reason to use the private booth because elections for the district representative were held at the same time as elections for the House of Nationalities where a choice of candidates was more common. Voters faced with only one name in the district elections felt cheated and many of them protested by voting against. In roughly half of such districts the single candidate was not elected.

*This was because the candidate had to get fifty per cent of the votes?*

Yes. But there is another aspect of the electoral arrangements which contributed unexpectedly to the defeat of official candidates. I believe that here in Britain or France, or in other countries, there is only a name and a party affiliation on the ballot. In the Soviet Union they made a very interesting miscalculation. They thought it wasn't good enough to have just a name—sometimes people wouldn't know that Ivanov or Petrov was regional or district Secretary. So they decided that the person's position and residence would be indicated as well. Thus an obkom secretary who stood as a candidate expected that he would have an advantage over an ordinary housewife or worker or engineer or historian. But this was far from being generally the case: people preferred to give their approval to somebody who was not so important, not so elevated. Thus an admiral or Warsaw Pact commander lost the ballot in favour of some local military captain; or the chairman of a local collective farm won against the head of a Central Committee department. Another reason for this was that whereas in the past people thought a high Party official might help their district to get preference in supplies, or would be better suited to help them in some other way, the worsening economic situation had significantly weakened such expectations and shortages of every type meant that public dissatisfaction was greater. All these factors, then, played an important role, and had it not been for safe seats nominated by public organizations, many important figures like Ligachev would not have been elected.

*After the amazing debates of the People's Congress in May and June it was, I think, feared that the Supreme Soviet would become just a tool of the apparatus or, as one of the radical deputies put it, a Stalino-Brezhnevite conclave. What would be your estimate of how effective the Supreme Soviet has been? How much of a power and how democratic an organ does it promise to be?*

Yes, it was Afanasyev, the rector of the historical archives institute, who made that prediction. This turned out to be false for a number of reasons. First of all, more than one half of the Supreme Soviet consisted of people who had passed through a contested election, and they actually felt responsibilities to their electorate rather than to Party officials. Secondly, quite a few party secretaries and apparatchiks selected from different regions found that, according to the rules, they would have to resign from their other jobs in order to serve full-time in the Supreme Soviet, which was not scheduled to meet for weeks or months at a time. Since there was no infrastructure in place guaranteeing them apartments, equivalent salaries and other customary benefits, many were reluctant to commit themselves and so kept out of the proceedings of the Supreme Soviet.

*Did they resign and were replaced or . . . ?*

They didn't resign and they weren't replaced; they were members of the Supreme Soviet, but they didn't take part in its discussions and decisions. This applied to about one hundred party officials, or state officials and deputy ministers. As a result, the Supreme Soviet actually changed its rule requiring more than fifty per cent of its members to ratify a ministerial appointment, and allowed nominations to be approved by a majority of those present. The relative weight of more liberal or democratic deputies was thus increased within the composition of the Supreme Soviet. People like my brother Roy, for example, didn't have any position; he didn't have to resign a post anywhere. But for Yeltsin it was different—he had to resign because he was a full minister. Perhaps I should mention a final reason why senior Party figures have hesitated to resign their posts. The Supreme Soviet has a rotation system: every year it will replace one fifth of its members. So a person thinks: why should I resign as obkom secretary when after a year I might be replaced here?

*Is the Supreme Soviet actually carving out a role for itself? Is it now an institution of some power or influence?*

It has become a major institutional power for one very simple reason. It was discovered through the work of the Supreme Soviet that the Soviet Union has a great shortage of legislation. All kinds of decrees have been issued since Stalin's time, but they do not have the quality of laws. When the deputies compared this with the situation in the West, they found that all kinds of relations between people and institutions—solicitors, the bureaucracy, property rights and so on—were covered by laws, acts of Parliament, guilds and so on. And now that economic organizations have to work on a self-financing basis, there is a great need for legislation in these areas, as well as on all kinds of questions to do with taxation, citizenship, travel abroad, and

so on. The Supreme Soviet found that it is a difficult task to pass new laws: they have to be logical and consistent, to follow certain principles, and to reflect the legislation of other countries and international laws. This undoubtedly gave the Supreme Soviet a greater sense of its responsibilities.

*What impact do the debates of the Congress and the Supreme Soviet have in society at large?*

Both the People's Congress and the Supreme Soviet have had a great impact. From the very beginning of the Congress of People's Deputies, they decided to have live broadcasts of all proceedings. In Britain we now have short extracts from Parliament because otherwise it would be a very boring programme. But in the Soviet Union suddenly the public was watching television all the time: so one of the channels was entirely devoted to reporting the Congress throughout the day. The Supreme Soviet decided to follow the same rule—not live, because people have to work during the day, but in the evening, between six and midnight, they broadcast a programme giving nearly full coverage of debates. The Supreme Soviet is really a forum for the whole country and encourages deputies to give priority to representing their districts. If they make a speech or statement, they realize that it is not only the apparatus or their fellow deputies who listen and judge them, but also the public at large and their constituencies. Deputies now get a sizeable mail-bag from people with comments or complaints.

*I remember when we interviewed you ten years ago you spoke about the utter arbitrariness of the Soviet judicial system, with all the power in the hands of the prosecution. Do the new laws of the Supreme Soviet tackle this? Who is implementing these laws on the ground? Do proper safeguards for a rule of law exist, or is this in the future still?*

They are only just beginning to exist because the Supreme Soviet and Congress are well behind schedule. This delay arises because draft laws proposed by the government, the Central Committee or various ministries have encountered strong resistance, and discussion in committees and in the Supreme Soviet itself has led to many amendments and revisions. Practically none of the draft laws—whether on the press, strikes, pension rights or military service—has been agreed in the terms originally submitted to the Supreme Soviet. This never used to happen, of course: it was enough to get the approval of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, which determined everything. The deputies feel that they have to create laws which will be durable and meet with the approval of the public. It has been calculated that only one per cent of life in the Soviet Union is regulated by laws—the other ninety-nine by ad hoc decrees. If no further amendments are made, the pension law will be the first to be passed early this year.

*This enacts an improvement in pension rights?*

Yes, a very substantial improvement. Feeling the importance of their work, deputies started to criticize the arrangement by which they had

to replace one fifth of the Supreme Soviet every year. This rule, which might remove experienced and competent people, has now been amended to read 'up to one fifth', so it may be that only twenty-five or thirty deputies will be replaced—probably those who are not taking part in the work of the Supreme Soviet. Deputies feel that they must become and are becoming a new kind of representative—professional members of parliament, experienced legislators who respond not only to Party or Central Committee or Politburo discipline but to people from their constituencies. And they hope that with all the publicity surrounding their work, they will meet with approval and be elected again.

*In the Western reports—and I think they are echoing Soviet usage—one hears about 'left-wing' deputies and this usually seems to refer to the Inter-Regional group. What is the left/right division in Soviet politics? What does it mean today?*

It doesn't correspond to the conventional meaning or sense of these terms in Britain. I would consider the Inter-Regional group as radical, rather than as left. In fact it is not politically homogeneous: its leaders have ranged from Sakharov to Boris Yeltsin; from Afanasyev the historian to Gdlyan, who was actually dismissed from his job as special investigator. The grouping is dominated by Moscow deputies, with some support from the Baltic but very little from the central Asian republics or the Caucasus. They are radical in the sense that they want a market reform and private enterprise to be introduced more quickly, particularly in agriculture. In my opinion many of their recommendations are superficial, very superficial. They have a non-professional attitude to complex problems, including the market and its relationship to a wider culture and social formation. This radical group is potentially a kind of new party, with more or less obvious ambitions to wield power, and its debates and meetings do have considerable resonance among a public deeply unhappy with the current state of affairs. The economy is in trouble, there are nationalist movements with incompatible objectives, there is an increase in crime. So although the radicals lack a competent programme, or even a thought-out and consistent alternative, they feel that public dissatisfaction with Gorbachev gives them a strong basis of support. This is why this group is now considered more dangerous than the conservatives. For the conservative group is essentially supported by the upper echelons of the party, people who would like to preserve their privileges and special position. But simply defending privileges is a difficult thing to do today.

*This inter-regional group does seem to be genuinely radical, however, in the sense that it has supported big developments like the miners' strikes of last summer and December, even when these are difficult to reconcile with the pro-market stance of its economists.*

Yes, that's right. They give support to popular unrest, except when it assumes an aggressively nationalist form. Even though they have a lot of backing from the Baltic states, they are reluctant to support aspirations for independence. But in general, their attempt to cater to

different interests makes this group very unstable. Its economic programme is not serious: it wants the Soviet Government to raise large loans and take credits from the West, in order to facilitate the import of consumer goods and to satisfy the domestic market. For three years, they think, surplus demand on the internal market should be met by imports. During this breathing space the Soviet economy would manage to develop high technology and begin to get to the level where it could start a new export drive—not of raw materials but of more technological products. These would then make it possible to pay back the credits and loans.

*Do you think this is realistic?*

I do not. The Polish example, as well as the Hungarian, show that it is not realistic. The Soviet Union already has a foreign debt of about 50 billion dollars, and if it tries to satisfy domestic demand for consumer goods in this way, it will double it. But it cannot be sure that the debt-servicing capacity from exports will actually be better than it is now. So far Gorbachev has resisted the idea that increased debt is the solution. The Government is ready to face some public discontent at this moment rather than improve life by the easy option of borrowing money. You can't satisfy public demands like that in the long term.

*There was a big dispute in the Supreme Soviet about the cooperatives, even a proposal to abolish them. Did the radicals support the cooperatives?*

They do support the cooperatives, and this is their strong point because the cooperatives are under attack from the government, and particularly from the trade unions. Cooperatives do not have to employ union members, their workers or members get higher incomes, and state industry loses qualified labour as a result. There are no restrictions on their activities, and this is disliked by the KGB and the Ministry of the Interior. In the recent debate about crime rates, the cooperatives were criticized as a vehicle whereby capital accumulated in the black-market economy can be legalized. The cooperatives are also often unpopular with the public, because the prices of their goods and services are much higher than in the state sector. But if the cooperatives were closed or restricted, then dislocation in the economy could only get worse.

*Do you think there is coherence in the economic programme of the government?*

The resources of capital for investment have been seriously reduced in the last few years. The Soviet Union suffered a loss of revenue from sales of alcohol which used to account for nearly twenty-five or thirty billion roubles, five or six per cent of the budget. Then the fall in oil and gas prices led to a decline in hard currency earnings as well as shortages in the internal economy. The Chernobyl disaster alone was very costly—officially ten billion roubles but really much higher—and the Armenian earthquake also required huge outlays. All these factors have made it impossible to complete many projects which were already under way, while the conversion of the military industry is beginning to make further claims on investment. There is an urgent

need to improve standards of health care. Every problem needs money and the government does not have money.

*It runs a big deficit.*

Yes, the official figure is one hundred billion roubles—some economists tell us it is one hundred and sixty billion, or fifteen per cent of the national income. But still the government continues to print more money, and the budget for next year envisages a sixty billion rouble deficit—it will almost certainly be even higher. This has created a very difficult situation: throughout the economy there is a large excess of demand over supply. Enterprises and individuals have large quantities of unspent cash—which makes it difficult to overcome shortages. Many people in Congress and in the press are discussing the need for a currency reform, but others argue that this would not solve the problem, that it would be very hard to carry out, and so on. Finally, the deficiency of the financial infrastructure and banking system makes it difficult for the government to implement the policy of self-financing and market discipline for enterprises.

*Ryzhkov's New Year programme has mainly been interpreted as a retreat from the marketization programme.*

I think the government has realized that it can't remodel the USSR as a market economy so long as the ministries are the main economic levers. It would be necessary to reorganize the government structure as a whole. It has also realized that it cannot simply introduce the market in one country, because the market is now a world market. You can't have a market in Britain competing only with British producers. You have to compete with the French, with the Swedish, with the Japanese and so on. In the Soviet Union it is the same. They have, let us say, combine harvesters of seven different types produced at one big plant, and they have nobody to compete with: competition in the Soviet Union means they have to open the Soviet economy to Western producers as well. Soviet televisions, tractors or cars are not good enough to compete, and they don't have the convertible currency to do this. In some consumer goods sectors you could mainly have factories competing with each other, but then state industry would have to compete with cooperatives which would have every chance of winning, in terms of diversity and flexibility if not in terms of price. But cooperatives are actually a kind of private or semi-private enterprise, and the government does not want to introduce a system in which state-controlled industry would compete with private industry. It wants to retain a privileged provision for the state, because the state is represented by the government.

*Ryzhkov, in introducing the new property law in the Supreme Soviet in November, seemed to envisage the legalization of joint stock companies. In fact every form of property—apart from one-man management of a large-scale enterprise—would be legal.*

Yes, it is now more or less inevitable that most types of private property will be legalized. They have also made a lot of concessions to

attract Western companies, which will now be allowed to own more than fifty per cent of ventures. The problem is that economic stability is lacking and the skills of the Soviet workforce are not of a high enough level to attract foreign capital.

*How about the sweeping proposals for privatization—not only inviting in foreign capital, but even opening up to native capital as we have seen in Poland or Hungary? Some—Shmelev and Popov, for example—have advocated this for the Soviet Union itself.*

There are some schemes for an experimental privatization in certain factories, collective farms and even industries. On the 3rd of January an editorial in *Izvestia* advocated the creation of a market in government papers and bonds that would raise money and soak up inflationary cash surpluses. Another scheme exists for certain specialized small enterprises—not heavy industry—to allow workers to own shares. I know of successful enterprises such as that headed by Dr Federov, one of the leading eye specialists, who introduced shares for all members of his clinic. They receive income from their shares, extra pensions, and some social benefits. It's very popular with the employees.

*These shares are held only by workers in the eye clinic?*

Yes. Their incomes are three or four times higher than in other medical institutes. But remember that this clinic is actually part of a national health service—you don't pay for treatment there. Its only profits are from treating foreigners, offering consultations and from the state as well. Yet even a nurse in this clinic, with its profit-sharing scheme, receives more than qualified doctors in other clinics. Similar schemes can be found in farms, factories and other enterprises, but the shares can be owned only by the employees, and the idea is that if the worker gets shares, he or she will try to increase the profits and productivity of the enterprise, to get extra benefits from the shares. There is still no stockmarket or anything like that, where shares could be sold and purchased.

*Do you think that current Soviet experiments could lead to a restoration of capitalism?*

There is certainly every intention of fostering a capitalist sector with joint ventures and special zones for private enterprise in the Baltic republics and the Far East, with Japanese participation. Some economists like Shmelev or Selyunin would like to see a 'free market' society, they don't use the word capitalism. But Soviet economists are prone to be unrealistic about capitalism. They pay a brief visit to the West and see the prosperity, but they don't see the poverty associated with it—in the Third World, for example. Nor do they consider all the difficulties of simply importing capitalist institutions into a different environment and expecting them to function just as they do in the West. For example, recently there has been an attempt to pay Soviet managers a higher salary of around 800 roubles a month, still not very much at all for a professional person. Nevertheless there has been a public outcry against this. Soviet people have an egalitarian psychology.

I think an American senior executive would expect half a million dollars a year, but such a figure would not be accepted in the Soviet Union. Some of Gorbachev's advisers speak of democratic socialism of the sort they have in Sweden, which is based on a type of capitalism. But there is now great pressure to produce results and it is not a question of labels.

*Returning to the performance of the economy itself, do you think there are any sectors that would meet the standards for a Soviet export drive on world markets?*

'World markets' is a very broad category. You can see Soviet motor cars here and they are more or less successful—this is the cheapest range of a specific type, and I can see that the Soviet Union can compete in quite a few fields but only where no high technology is needed.

*How about aircraft production?*

It has been said at the Congress and in the general press that Soviet aircraft are based on the technology of the 'sixties. New models will come on stream in the nineties, but they will not be up to the level of American, French, British or other companies and Aeroflot is interested in leasing Airbuses and Boeings for its international routes. On the other hand, Soviet aircraft are cheaper, so they may actually be more popular for smaller third world airlines and for countries like Hungary which have roubles. I don't think the Soviet Union will be able to sell its products to West European or American or Japanese or other developed economies. The Soviet Union has the potential to sell its products in India, in China, in third world countries, because they are cheap while still being serviceable. Today cooperatives are emerging which try to sell simple equipment or domestic appliances or kitchenware. In fact, Soviet kitchenware may not be all that stylish but it's ten times cheaper than Western products and can do the job needed. But there is also the general problem that Soviet producers don't have the proper commercial network or facilities to sell these things. Two years ago there was a so-called monopoly of foreign trade, so Soviet companies were not able to market their goods abroad; they had to do this through a ministerial network and the bureaucratic obstacles were enormous. Now they are beginning to explore the possibilities.

*The Soviet domestic market also needs third world products, doesn't it?*

Yes, that's right, agricultural and other products. They don't properly appreciate the reciprocal advantages of exchanging Soviet machinery for foodstuffs and manufactures. Roy wrote about this in his article on the Soviet Union and China.<sup>1</sup>

*Do you think that in the new conditions the considerable achievement of Soviet science in pure research will be able to filter through more into raising the general level of life in the Soviet Union?*

---

<sup>1</sup> Roy Medvedev, 'The USSR and China: Confrontation or Detente?', *New Left Review* 142, November–December 1983.



Not immediately. Academic and other theoretical fields are where Soviet science enjoys a high reputation. But if you take engineering, electronics or computing, there have been very dramatic developments in recent years and the gap with the West is certainly not getting any narrower. When Soviet engineers or others go to Japan or America they are impressed by how quickly one generation of high technology is supplanted by another, and they feel that their system is not flexible enough to achieve the same rate of development. Recently I have read a number of articles by people who have visited America and who feel that it will take decades for the Soviet Union to absorb all these new fax machines and communications technology. They feel depressed that their facilities, their equipment levels are not sophisticated enough for them to have an independent development. So they want to open Soviet science and technology to much wider possibilities, allowing scientists to travel and study abroad, to have close cooperation with Western science. The government is quite open to this, but has no money to undertake it. The only area where the link to high technology is more advanced is the military-oriented sciences.

The Soviet Union now faces the problem of how to build a large plant to manufacture personal computers. In fact, some people argue that if there is just one big plant it will not satisfy the need for a range of different models, and that only many plants, many factories could make the country face the necessary world competition in this field and reduce the expenditure of hard currency on imports. But most estimates suggest that this could take a decade or more to achieve. There is a very limited base from which to introduce all this computerization.

*I've heard that Soviet technicians have already made some contributions in software. Is that right?*

Some contributions, yes, but not the full range which is necessary to provide everything. The poor and obsolete character of the telecommunications system, for example, means that it is still impossible to receive a fax outside Moscow and some other big cities.

*We have discussed many problems of the Soviet economy, and you have mentioned various disasters including earthquakes and nuclear accidents. Then there are the nationalist movements in the South, the West and the North West, sometimes supported by the local Communist Party. You have also mentioned the problems of everyday life—shortages, crime and many others. Do you think Gorbachev can survive this tremendous accumulation of problems?*

I believe Gorbachev will survive—and not because nobody would want to replace him. The problem is not that he fails to do his job properly. Of course, the very diverse demands put great pressure on him. He has to work so hard, and be involved in such an enormous range of potentially explosive issues, that people have expressed concern about his health and his capacity to cope. He managed to deal with the miners' strikes by meeting most of their demands. But the problems in the Caucasus, or in central Asia, or in the Baltic states, are much more difficult to solve, because they are based on emotional or

historic grounds and involve incompatible claims. Gorbachev tries to find the optimal way to accommodate these protesters, to follow the natural course of political development without too much disruption for the economy. But in the Caucasus the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh reached such an acute level that Azerbaijan decided to sabotage all rail links to Armenia and food and other supplies had to be airlifted in—a kind of repeat of the Berlin blockade. This created great economic problems for Armenia, as it did for Azerbaijan itself when Armenia retaliated with a rail blockade of the Nakhichevan enclave. These hostilities are based on differences which developed over more than a thousand years, and Gorbachev's intervention just doesn't make any difference. The conflict is emotional, it's nationalistic, it's irrational; it's sometimes just hatred. Gorbachev tried to introduce the military there, but the military can't operate railways, so it is the kind of conflict which Gorbachev can't solve.

*It would seem that the Communist Party has ceased to be an effective force on a union basis.*

No, on an all-union basis the Communist party apparatus still gives some kind of unity and tries as best it can to keep the federal state going. At this level Party control is still more important than economic links or the military. But the Party ceased being a force in Azerbaijan, because the local officials are extremely unpopular and have no authority. They receive their orders and commands from the Central Committee, but they don't have the authority to implement them. The Azeri Popular Front is based on nationalistic elements and is now a real power in the republic. Similarly, in Lithuania the Communist Party realized that if it didn't break with the CPSU and claim to represent national interests, it would lose the election due in March to the nationalist Sajudis. This emergence of very strong nationalist movements is something which Gorbachev just cannot control.

*The Caucasian and Baltic republics only comprise a very small component of the Soviet Union's total population and land area. Can it survive even with a quite high level of unrest and internecine strife, or even if they secede?*

Yes. When Gorbachev met with the Lithuanian intellectuals he even spoke of the RSFSR, the Russian Republic, invoking the right of secession, in which case it would be a rich country and still the largest in the world with lots of oil and other raw materials which could be exploited just for its own benefit. At present such raw materials are supplied to the Baltic republics and to Comecon members on highly advantageous terms. So the Federation could exist without Lithuania or the other small republics, but the latter could have real problems of economic viability; they would need to negotiate special arrangements on economic matters and security. These problems are not simple. The population of Lithuania is both larger and more homogeneous than the other Baltic republics. But while it could perhaps be economically viable, there would still be the problem of the Kaliningrad region—that enclave of the RSFSR which is separated by Lithuania from the main body of the Russian Federation.

*This spring elections will be held in the big central republics of Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia. Do you think the authority of the Party could survive what might be as big a challenge as last year's?*

In one sense the Party will survive these elections and win a majority in the Supreme Soviets of Russia, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan and most other republics. Even in the Congress of People's Deputies, Party members were actually more numerous than in previous Supreme Soviets. But the problem today is that membership in the Party often means little. There is a great difference between being a member and being a functionary of the apparatus. Ordinary members are now leaving the Party in large numbers, and if radicals like Yeltsin are not expelled—as they would have been long ago if the rules had been strictly applied—this is because the Party does not want to incur unpopularity. The Party is no longer the monolithic body it used to be—it is now a conglomerate of different groups with different political platforms. So when we ask whether the 'Party' will be able to keep the Ukraine or Uzbekistan in line with its policies and decisions, we now refer to the Central Committee or Politburo. In this sense party control will be difficult to keep. The Soviet Congress has recently made substantial changes in the constitution, but it still requires that legislation in the republics should not contradict legislation at federal or all-union level. In practice conflicts between the two are quite common, but there are no institutions to resolve them and Gorbachev has urged the Congress to create a kind of committee to arbitrate constitutional disputes, and to rule whether republican decisions can be repealed or cancelled if they conflict with all-union law. For example, the Estonians introduced a requirement that you have a right to vote only if you have been living in Estonia for more than two years. Many people who had been living there for less than two years felt that this was a violation of the constitution which gives everyone equal rights. But Estonians argued that many countries have voting requirements—in Britain you can't take part in elections if you are not a citizen—and they introduced legislation on Estonian citizenship. This is not against the constitution because the constitution says that Estonia is a sovereign republic. So the constitution itself has many potential contradictions, because it says that all republics are sovereign states, and at the same time it does not give them the rights which sovereign states normally exercise. Eventually I think that the Soviet Union as it is now will be replaced by a kind of federation with a variety of constituent agreements: any agreement with Latvia, for example, would be different from those with Uzbekistan or Tadzhikistan or Ukraine.

*Do you think that a Russian nationalist movement—like Pamyat, the Union of Russian Workers or some Russian Popular Front—will become a powerful force? Might they be elected in the local elections that are due now, or the republican election?*

There are already some Congress deputies who sympathize with such a nationalism—Belov, for example, and some other writers. They have ideas which are similar to those of Pamyat. But essentially Pamyat is not a very strong organization—it does not have a very large following among the workers.

*How about the Union of Russian Workers?*

It is also quite small. More important are the strike committees which emerged in coalmining areas and some others and which defend economic rather than nationalist rights. They now have the chance to develop into a kind of alternative trade union group. In my view, Russian nationalist feelings do not represent a danger to the central government.

*How about the conservative forces more generally? The new Leningrad chief now seems to be supporting attacks on perestroika, or at least on glasnost.*

Yes, but he will have to face the test of the elections soon. His predecessor, Selovyov, was not elected, even though he was a single candidate, so it was a disaster for the Leningrad Obkom. I think that the new Leningrad boss is a more technocratic person—he has tried to reflect the movement in Leningrad in order not to suffer this humiliation during elections in the Russian federation. The local elections are in some ways even more serious than last year's elections because party secretaries are expected to play the same role here that Gorbachev does as President. So if the obkom secretary is not elected he will have to resign his post.

*And this could happen, you think?*

It could happen—not perhaps with everybody, but a few might suffer defeat and have to resign. It would then be necessary to find a new obkom secretary or a more popular figure. It is important to understand that the outcome of these Republican and local elections is of vital significance to the local Party apparatus, and that is why many of them are trying to satisfy local nationalist demands. The Congress and Supreme Soviet are significant for foreign policy, economic policy and so on, but they do not directly concern the livelihood of the regional or Republican Secretary.

*So what you are talking about is a possible crisis for many leading Communists?*

Yes, a crisis for many—although it will perhaps help Gorbachev to rejuvenate the Party with more reform-minded members. In fact, Gorbachev has hinted that Article 6, which guarantees the Party's leading role, may be revoked. But in the first instance he evidently wants this to be a decision of the Party, rather than have the Supreme Soviet impose it on the Party. It now looks as if the CPSU Congress will be brought forward to May or June of this year because there are so many urgent questions to deal with and because the Party leadership and Central Committee need renewal. Gorbachev is also anxious to revise the Party rules.

*What will be the status of the new republican authorities that will be elected this spring? Will they have real powers, locally? Could they have their own enterprises . . . ?*

Yes, this is what they are struggling for now. The Baltic states have already received this autonomy, this so-called autonomy, in which they will own and manage most of the agricultural and industrial enterprises in their territory. Some enterprises of importance for the whole country will remain under central control. It is likely that after the election some other republics will try to get the same kind of independence. But the problem for several of them, like those in Central Asia, is that they receive subsidies from the central government; they are not so developed and would not like to be entirely independent economically.

*I would like now to turn to the dramatic events in Eastern Europe. What is going to be the impact on Soviet public opinion and political life of such remarkable developments as the Berlin Wall coming down, the overthrow of Honecker and of Ceausescu, and the emergence of new forms of popular power in Romania, Czechoslovakia and perhaps East Germany. Will they strengthen the conservatives, or will they encourage the reformists?*

These events will certainly encourage the reform wing of the Communist Party and the state as well. It is necessary to take each of the countries separately because they are seen in different ways by Soviet public opinion. The most enthusiastic attitude was to the Romanian revolution and to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, because the Soviet public first of all wants freedom to travel and freedom of communication. The crossings of the border with Iranian Azerbaijan are, I think, an attempt to repeat the events in Germany. It is quite obvious—they demolished the border fences, and the barbed wire and towers. At the same time, what happened in Poland did not make such an impact. For Soviet intellectuals, it is difficult to understand Poland because a prime minister emerged who doesn't look like a professional figure competent to deal with the economic problems: it seems he has been chosen because of his connections with the Catholic Church. The public at large does not understand what is going on in Poland; what they read in the papers indicates that the Polish economy is in a mess and continuing to decline, and there does not appear to be a solution. In the case of Czechoslovakia the government, intellectuals and the wider public have been puzzled by the appearance of this new President, a dramatist. They feel that such a position should be given to a more qualified, professional person.

*I suppose he won his position as an opponent of the apparatus. Surely there would be a layer of Soviet opinion that is hostile to the apparatus?*

Yes, but it would be impossible in the Soviet Union for, say, the chairman of the Writers Union to become president of the state. Even Shatrov, who wrote good historical plays, was not elected to the Congress. The Soviet public don't understand what is going on in Czechoslovakia: it is something unusual, something strange. Russians often try to follow an example, to judge whether it would be good for them to go the same way or not. What happened in Romania is something they can understand. They feel that they should have challenged Brezhnev when he was head of the state and overthrown his government. They feel it was a very good thing that this dictator was finally overthrown. Events in Germany also seem to be encouraging, because they are leading to democratic rights and to anti-corruption drives.

*Looking at the sphere of international relations, it would be difficult to contest that the years 1988–89 have witnessed a diminution of the Soviet Union's power, measured in military or economic terms—that is to say, in conventional great power terms. Soviet influence in Eastern Europe is declining, and Moscow will have to withdraw its military forces. Isn't there a feeling that Gorbachev has made big concessions to the West without any quid pro quo? Gorbachev has great moral prestige, but the West has not had to make any concessions. Bush felt he could walk into Panama. There are no guarantees that Nicaragua is going to be allowed to develop without foreign harassment, or that Angola will be able to develop without the violence that the United States certainly encouraged in the last decade?*

People in the Soviet Union are not greatly preoccupied with international questions. The public at large, including intellectuals, is so taken up with economic problems—even shortages of necessities like food—that its mood is one of anger. When social tension is rising and people have to queue every day for all kinds of basic commodities, they tend to stop thinking rationally and international politics seems very remote. They also feel that they have lost the moral right to judge what is going on. I would say that Soviet people today have a sort of inferiority complex which prevents them from strongly denouncing the activity of other states. It encourages a degree of self-absorption. Against this we must consider the attempts that the Soviet population is making, however painful and slow at first, to develop its own self-government and its own solutions.

*You yourself revisited the Soviet Union last year for the first time in many years. What impression did it make on you?*

My feelings were complex. But my most immediate impression was that materially life had become more difficult: for instance, I saw people queueing for things which were readily available in 1972. Moscow itself is not as clean as I remember it, and there are signs of decay and disrepair, dust and neglect. It would take a long time to discuss why this is the case, but clearly there is a shortage of funds. Of course everyday conversations were different and much more interesting than before, but this basically means that taxi-drivers or other people you meet just tell you about their problems. You don't hear much that is encouraging. Nobody seems optimistic, and there are very clear social tensions in Moscow and other towns.

Interviewer: RB

Bob Jessop  
Kevin Bonnett  
Simon Bromley

## Farewell to Thatcherism? Neo-Liberalism and 'New Times'

There can be no doubt that the Thatcher government over the last year or so has encountered a crisis of public confidence: some even believe the end of Thatcherism is nigh.<sup>1</sup> Signs of impending doom were already discerned in June 1989 when the Conservative party suffered its first ever defeat in elections to the European Parliament, in what was widely seen as a national referendum on ten years of Thatcherism. The ensuing Cabinet reshuffle in July 1989, the most extensive under any Thatcher government, brought more 'wets' into the front line and was so badly managed that it is said to have further undermined party morale. This was followed in November by the dramatic resignation of Nigel Lawson, the architect of the 1987 election boom and the 1988 tax-cutting budget which had promised so much for the party. Moreover, although Mrs Thatcher easily survived the first challenge to her party leadership last December, some commentators believe she may not be able to do the same this year if her problems continue to accumulate. Others suggest that, even if she does, she is already a lame-duck premier; and

that the price of survival will be the abandonment, or at least moderation, of radical Thatcherism. Labour's lead in the polls encourages hopes that, with or without Mrs Thatcher, the Conservatives can be defeated in the next election. In any event, for whatever reason and whether with pleasure, sadness or a tinge of *Schadenfreude*, Thatcherism has been declared 'dead' by forces on left and right alike and the post-Thatcherite era has been heralded along with the new decade. The purpose of this article is: (a) to criticize prevailing explanations (actual or implied) for the end of Thatcherism; (b) to outline our own explanation for its current crisis; (c) to discuss more fully the economic aspects of the crisis in their domestic and international dimensions; and (d) to consider how far and in what respects the impact of Thatcherism to date could be reversed and what this implies for a post-Thatcher politics.

### The End of Thatcherism?

Although Mrs Thatcher and Thatcherism have been constant features of the political scene in the last fifteen years, they have been far from unchanging. In earlier work we proposed a fourfold periodization: (a) the rise of Thatcherism as a social movement; (b) the period of consolidation, 1979–82; (c) consolidated Thatcherism, 1982–86; and (d) radical Thatcherism, from the 1986 party conference onwards.<sup>2</sup> One might have been tempted to say farewell to Thatcherism at the conclusion of each period—but each time it proved to be the end only of a specific version or stage, to be succeeded by a newer, recharged form. Thus we should ask whether it is only radical, neo-liberal Thatcherism which is currently in crisis; or whether the Thatcherite project is now completely exhausted and has no prospects of renewal. Moreover, although Mrs Thatcher is so closely identified with her eponymous strategy, it does not follow that Thatcherism without Thatcher is unthinkable. Nor should we exclude the possibility that Britain might be ruled by the umpteenth Mrs Thatcher, as it was once governed by the fourteenth Lord Home or the 'fourteenth Mr Wilson'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, since the House of Commons's proceedings have been televised, a new Mrs Thatcher is already being presented for 'popular acclaim'—less strident, 'greener', and more caring.

The main journal to have attempted a theorization of 'Thatcherism' has been *Maoism Today*, although its focus has shifted over the years from ideology to economics. At first its contributors attempted to

<sup>1</sup> Although Tom Ling could not co-author the present article, we are glad to acknowledge his continuing influence on our analysis.

<sup>2</sup> In our book we identified three periods; more recently, one of us discussed a distinct period of radical Thatcherism. See B. Jessop et al., *Thatcherism: a Tale of Two Nations*, Cambridge 1989; and B. Jessop, 'Thatcherism. the British Road to Post-Fordism?', *Essex Papers in Politics and Government*, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> In the anti-Establishment fervour of the early 1960s, the Labour Party attacked the hereditary rank of Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who had resigned an earldom to become Conservative Prime Minister in 1963. Sir Alec's defenders claimed they would rather be ruled by him than the 'fourteenth Mr Wilson'—alluding as much to Harold Wilson's well-known pragmatic opportunism as to the self-evident fact that even Labour leaders have progenitors.



explain the success of Thatcherism in constructing an 'authoritarian populist' project and despaired over the Labour Party's failure to develop a socialist counter-hegemony. More recently, as the evidence has mounted that this 'hegemonic project' never really became hegemonic, there was envious recognition of Thatcherism's alleged ability to identify itself economically and politically with the 'New Times' accompanying the transition to post-Fordism. In turn this led to agonized calls for a new, radical and flexible alternative from the left. Now, as the crisis unfolds, however, the editorial line claims that only the Left can work with the grain of 'New Times'.

If the 'end of Thatcherism' has been put on the agenda, this is not because it has lost some supposed hegemony or because the Left has defined an alternative, radical-democratic project and made it hegemonic. There is little evidence that Thatcherism was ever hegemonic and all the surveys point towards steadily declining levels of popular support rather than a sudden collapse.<sup>4</sup> Over a longer time-period it is just as doubtful whether Britain ever became truly Fordist.<sup>5</sup> The crisis of the postwar Keynesian welfare state and the British mode of growth certainly helped Thatcherism into power. But, as we argue below, there are very few indicators that consolidated Thatcherism is presiding over a fundamental transition to a post-Fordist society. Indeed there is a great deal to suggest that it is obstructing this shift.

*Marxism Today's* political message rejected predictions that Thatcherism would collapse under the weight of its economic contradictions and resulting class struggles. Thus it is ironic that economic explanations fare somewhat better than more ideological interpretations—indeed, it is difficulties and contradictions in the economic strategy of the Thatcher government which seem to have precipitated the current crisis. However, the economic crisis has not produced a radical left-wing mobilization in trade union or labour politics. It is reflected at best in intensified wage claims (to offset inflation and rising housing costs) and broad popular dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the economy. An upsurge of support for the Labour Party in its current guise hardly provides much support for orthodox expectations that economic crisis would generate political radicalism. But the role of this crisis in the decomposition of Thatcherism will require more detailed treatment below.

Another aspect of the crisis which is often highlighted is the fact that the political preconditions for the rise of Thatcherism are now on the wane. The crisis within the Labour Party has been resolved by a desperate *rassemblement* around Kinnock's 'red rose' labourism; Labour has also benefited as the renegade Social Democratic Party and the later Alliance between SDP and Liberals have given way to a new

<sup>4</sup> A general problem with accounts of Thatcherism is the lax use of the terms 'hegemony' and 'hegemonic project'. Although we have criticized this in earlier work, we must also plead guilty.

<sup>5</sup> The flawed character of British Fordism is discussed in B. Jessop, 'Neo-Conservative Regimes and the Transition to Post-Fordism: Britain and West Germany', in M. Gott-diener and N. Komninos, eds., *Capitalist Development and Crisis Theory*, London 1989.

'party with no name' and the 'Single Doctor Party' (the rump SDP led by Dr David Owen). The trade unions now enjoy greater public esteem than British managers and are no longer held responsible for Britain's economic problems. Nevertheless, such observations do little more than describe recent political events and cannot explain why Thatcherism itself is in crisis. For this we must turn to the internal contradictions of Thatcherism.

### The Decomposition of Thatcherism

Thatcherism has not yet come to an end: at most we are witnessing the beginning of the end as it starts decomposing. Some of its core elements will disappear along with Mrs Thatcher, but others will survive intact, find new forms, or be included in new economic and political strategies. This is the message of the more statist, Europeanist and socially conscious version of Thatcherism offered by 'Heseltinism', for example; it can also be seen in the appeal of the sort of revanchist Thatcherism voiced most recently by Norman Tebbit. Such divisions in the Conservative Party can be expected to grow. The current crisis in Thatcherism has four main aspects: a steady erosion of Mrs Thatcher's personal authority as unease spreads at her style of leadership; a crisis of economic policy—especially over inflation and Europe; a broader collapse of Thatcher's neo-liberal economic strategy; and, related to this, a failure of the 'two nations' strategy to consolidate a stable social base for Thatcherism.

Mrs Thatcher is no stranger to crises of authority. In 1981, she was receiving the lowest opinion poll ratings ever recorded by a British prime minister, and she has faced problems ever since. In particular we can cite the Westlands affair in 1985–86 and her acquiescence in the use of American air bases in Britain for the US bombing raid on Libya in early 1986.<sup>6</sup> But in each case Thatcher's popularity was still above that of the Conservative Party and the crisis was resolved through pragmatic shifts behind a façade of resolute, self-righteous rhetoric and measures to improve the short-term performance of the economy. The crisis seems more intense today because there are real problems elsewhere. One of the most worrying recent trends for Thatcher's supporters is that, for the first time since she became Prime Minister, she now trails the Conservative Party in the opinion polls—suggesting that public hostility is being directed at Mrs Thatcher in particular. Moreover, as we enter the 1990s, the political agenda is shifting back towards social concerns and on to green issues. It is doubtful whether a change in her image from 'iron lady' to caring 'mother of the nation' and environmentally concerned scientist will carry conviction. While there has been adverse public reaction to specific government policies—the introduction of the poll tax, the

<sup>6</sup> The controversy over competing take-over bids for the Westlands helicopter company culminated in the resignation of two Cabinet ministers: Leon Brittan as a scapegoat for Mrs Thatcher, and Michael Heseltine in anger at her style of leadership. This dispute involved more than personalities: at stake were the priorities of European and Atlanticist strategies. See H. Overbeek, 'The Westland Affair: Collision over the Future of British Capitalism', *Capital and Class* 29, 1986.

privatization of water and the handling of the ambulance workers being notable instances—the ground on which the government stands is most weakened by higher interest rates, falling house prices, rising consumer prices and other consequences of economic policy and structure.

The crisis of economic policy crystallized in the long-running conflict between Chancellor Lawson and Mrs Thatcher's personal economic adviser, Sir Alan Walters. This culminated in the dispute between Lawson and Thatcher in October 1989, resulting in the Chancellor's resignation. The disagreements often seemed arcane and were as often conducted behind closed City doors and in private official meetings as in the public domain. Technical details apart, the government's credibility as an economic manager was at stake in two key areas: the desirability, timing and conditions of British entry into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM); and the proper balance between interest rates, other forms of monetary restraint, and exchange-rate stability in economic management. However, once the short-term political damage had been successfully limited, it became clear that Lawson's resignation had provided a scapegoat for policy mistakes which could now be admitted and some freedom of manoeuvre for the new Chancellor, John Major, to re-orient policy. This is already well under way with an effective devaluation of sterling against the crucial Deutsche Mark, coded talk about a tough budget (perhaps with tax increases unthinkable under Lawson) to bring about a speedy reduction in interest rates, and early entry into the ERM.

The roots of the policy crisis go deeper, however, and cannot be separated from the structural evolution of the British economy. The government's general strategy and specific policies—on monetary control, fiscal fine-tuning or the exchange rate—have exacerbated some of the main problems in the economy and added new elements of deformation. These in turn have complicated the pursuit of neo-liberal orientations, creating strategic dilemmas and new forms of the familiar post-war 'stop-go' cycle. But even if policy mistakes had been avoided, the fundamental structural problems would still have been there. And they will still be present well after Thatcherism has disappeared from the political scene.

It is only in this general context that we can understand the problems now facing the radical Thatcherite project publicly launched at the 1986 Conservative Party Conference. For unchecked 'market forces' radicalism has combined with the emergence of 'market research' socialism to weaken Thatcherism in Westminster and among the electorate. The hopes of radical Thatcherism rested on developing and confirming the 'entrepreneurial society' and 'popular capitalism' as a hegemonic alternative to the Keynesian welfare state based on 'jobs for all' and 'social democracy'.<sup>7</sup> Pursuit of these twin objectives was intended to legitimate the all-too-clear shift towards a 'two nations' polarization of British society launched in earlier stages

---

<sup>7</sup> Reports on progress towards these twin pillars of Thatcherite society are published regularly in H.M. Treasury's *Economic Progress Reports*.

of Thatcherism.<sup>8</sup> Yet the very dynamic of Thatcherite neo-liberalism is undermining its social basis. Two nations certainly exist, but even the privileged nation has growing doubts about the Thatcherite project. As economic difficulties deepen over the next couple of years, the government's room for manoeuvre will shrink. In particular, the contradictory demands of the measures required to rescue the real economy and those deemed necessary to secure short-term electoral favour will become more acute and the Thatcher government will find it hard to manage its social base in ways consistent with its own understanding of sound economic management.

The current crisis facing Thatcherism cannot therefore be reduced to 'little local difficulties' within the Conservative Party or to the revival of Labour Party electoral fortunes, however much these party-political elements will affect how it is eventually resolved. Mrs Thatcher inherited a weak economy and weak state capacities from the period of the postwar settlement. And although she claims to have presided over an economic miracle and restored a strong but limited state, the actual legacy of the Thatcher years has been a further decline down the international economic hierarchy. In addressing these issues, we will first examine the claims for a supply-side economic miracle, and then assess the general impact of Thatcher government policies on the British economy as a whole.

### The 'Supply-Side Revolution'

How real is the alleged supply-side revolution? No one would deny that basic economic and political advances won by subordinate groups under the post-war settlement have been curtailed or rolled back. This was an explicit goal of Thatcherism and 'two nations' effects are everywhere. No one would deny that the organizational and strategic terrain has turned against organized labour and various subordinate, deprived and underprivileged sectors. This was also intended by Thatcherism—justified in the name of the free market and the opportunity society. Nor could anyone deny that dramatic advances have been made in promoting competition, deregulating markets, returning state-owned and other public economic activities to the private sector, and introducing market proxies and commercial values into the residual public sector. For this lies at the heart of the neo-liberal strategy. But such changes can only be taken as evidence of a supply-side revolution if one assumes that the liberation of market forces is in itself sufficient to regenerate the British economy and to create an opportunity society. Let us briefly review some readily available evidence.

First, behind the escalating trade deficit and the resurgence of inflation lies a basic failure in manufacturing. Since the Second World War the volume of UK imports (expressed as a percentage of GDP) has tended to grow much faster than export volumes. Nothing much has changed here under Thatcherism and the trendline over twenty years

---

<sup>8</sup> *Moravcsik Today's* commentators now describe the same phenomenon in terms of the 'two thirds/one third' society.

is unaltered. Since 1970, the volume of imports has grown at about 3.5 per cent annually while exports have risen by just 1 per cent. Last year this resulted in a balance-of-payments deficit which exceeded £20bn: of this over 70 per cent arose from trade with the European Community and 20 per cent with Japan. As North Sea Oil revenues and ~~not~~ invisible earnings also begin to fall, this growing manufacturing trade deficit must be financed by the inflow of 'hot money' tempted by high interest rates. Underlining the general deterioration in export and import performance is the equally poor performance in those high-technology and research-intensive sectors which are supposed to sustain the next long wave of economic expansion. Even chemicals and aero-space equipment show declines under Thatcher; and cars, consumer electronics, semi-conductors, computers and office equipment are disaster areas.

Second, despite government 'hype' over the alleged investment boom in capital goods, less than an eighth of the trade deficit is attributable to capital and intermediate goods. This does not reflect the comparative strength of the British capital goods industry (which is also in serious decline) but rather a general dearth of manufacturing investment. For, although real business investment has been growing annually at around 7 per cent since the trough in 1981, the share going to manufacturing has been small and has only just compensated for the decline experienced during the 1979-81 recession. Thus, over the whole period 1979-88, total business investment grew by 37.4 per cent, gross investment in industry and agriculture fell by 8.4 per cent, and investment in services rose by 93.1 per cent. The latter was heavily concentrated in banking, finance and business services and reflects the nature of the Thatcher boom.

Third, in exploring why industrial investment is so weak despite rising productivity and profits, we find that profits have gone into the financial, service and property sectors and that there is a general lack of confidence about UK manufacturing prospects. The abolition of exchange controls has, however, enabled many firms to invest abroad. Thus, between 1979 and 1986, the country's forty largest manufacturing firms cut their UK-based employment by 413,000 and increased overseas employment by 125,000.<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, even when manufacturing investment does occur at home, it is all too frequently of poor quality. Manufacturing productivity has certainly shown impressive annual gains since 1981 (around 5 per cent a year) but these flow mainly from three factors: (a) continued shedding of surplus labour hoarded by over-optimistic firms in the 1970s in conjunction with the recovery of output after the 1979-81 recession; (b) the weakening of organized labour and increased reliance on hire-and-fire, flexi-wage policies; and (c) an incremental, piecemeal approach to new investment which, too often, is more concerned with speeding up and intensifying the labour process than with upgrading workers' skills and adding value. This both reflects

---

<sup>9</sup> P Wintour, 'Manufacturers Shift Spending to Overseas Jobs', *The Guardian*, 5 May 1987.

and reinforces the continuing and much-lamented 'skill gap' in British industry. Yet it is this very gap which depresses its competitiveness in high-tech areas and, despite Thatcher's anti-union legislation, enables skilled workers to drive up real wages in the private sector. Indeed, between 1979 and 1988, real earnings in the UK grew by 28 per cent or over twice the rate in Japan, West Germany or France; in the USA, earnings actually fell by 6.5 per cent. These trends hardly indicate a real miracle and, combined with the overseas investment, go far to explain the paradox of rising manufacturing profits combined with stagnant capacity and output at home.

Fifth, in promoting inward and outward investment and the growth of a global financial system beyond national control, Thatcherism has produced a further paradox. For, whilst deindustrialization has proceeded apace in Britain, British-based multinationals remain strong in the global economy. By the early 1980s, UK foreign direct investment as a proportion of GDP was higher than for any other major economy; and Britain's share of total foreign direct investment in the same period was greater than that of the USA and almost twice that of Japan. The London Stock Exchange remains by far the largest market for publicly quoted capital in Europe. Of the top 500 European companies, UK capitalization was more than triple that of its nearest rival, West Germany. Among the largest 100 firms (as measured by annual turnover), 29 were British-based, 27 West German, and 17 French. Yet the UK has only three firms among the top *manufacturing* concerns while West Germany has nine and France has five. Among other effects the interaction of transnational productive capital and unregulated global financial markets has helped to undermine the UK economy in two respects. The coherence of its industrial core and the centrality of national links among individual capitals have declined; and, in addition, even without the retreat into neo-liberalism, national economic management would have become more complex and harder to pursue.<sup>20</sup>

Sixth, the internationalization of British capital is peculiarly schizophrenic. The bulk of UK overseas investment, reflecting recent as well as traditional investment patterns, is in the USA. The bulk of Britain's export trade, as well as the largest share of its trade deficit, is with Western Europe. This helps to explain Thatcherite hostility to developments within the European Community. Policies which could promote European protectionism or introduce social legislation would threaten the interests which attract multinational capital to Britain. The resistance to any extension of state economic intervention at the behest of the Commission may represent a sober calculation of the long-term interests of capitals operating from British economic space—whether British or foreign-owned.

Finally, although foreign-owned multinationals have stepped up their investments in Britain thanks to state subsidies and the prospects of

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. Radice, 'British Capitalism in a Changing Global Economy', in A. MacBwan and W.K. Tabb, eds., *Instability and Change in the World Economy*, New York 1989; and B. Jessop, 'The Mid-Life Crisis of Thatcherism', *New Socialist*, March 1986.

1992, they have done so in quite specific ways. For, as Nolan (among many others) has noted: 'the multinational companies . . . have come to see Britain not as a base for highly skilled, high value-added production, but as an ideal location in which to carry out labour-intensive assembly and sub-assembly work.'<sup>21</sup> They thus have little interest (at least in the short-run) in the progressive upgrading of plant and equipment, labour force skills, work organization, and management techniques.<sup>22</sup> Even Japanese concerns are careful to locate their European R&D centres and the more high-tech plants in West Germany rather than Britain. In this way they follow the already established pattern of many American multinationals in Europe.

### Making Things Worse, Not Better

In these respects one could plausibly argue that Thatcherism is merely the latest form in which the peculiarities of British capitalism have been expressed in Conservative politics. Its chosen economic strategy is neo-liberal and its latest political strategy has been popular capitalism. The main features of neo-liberalism comprise: (a) the privatization, deregulation and commercialization of the state sector; (b) promotion of the City as the centre for international financial capital; (c) the reinforcement of market forces by encouraging inward and outward investment and promoting the small business sector; and (d) the enhancement of capitalist 'flexibility' through legislative restraint of trade unionism, increasingly coercive 'training' schemes, a market-oriented social security programme, and various low-cost schemes aimed at helping business to help itself.<sup>23</sup> To date, this strategy for market-led recovery has met with only limited and partial success. Even on its own terms it could not reverse Britain's economic decline because too many firms active in Britain have narrow market interests which run counter to the pursuit of a coherent *national* accumulation strategy. And, once we consider the non-market conditions needed for recovery, a *laissez-faire* stance is wholly inappropriate and must be flanked by more directive and/or corporatist measures.

This general contradiction is reflected in a series of tensions and risks in Thatcherite economic policy. First, in pursuing both banking deregulation and a monetarist counter-inflation strategy, Thatcherism has created conditions discouraging investment in the 'real' economy. Banking profits come from making loans; and financial institutions compete with each other by inventing new financial instruments. Deregulation and liberalization of banking capital promotes this competition and helps banks to circumvent monetary restraint. In turn this makes it progressively harder for governments to control the money supply each time that tight money is needed for economic management. For financial innovation means that more credit can be

<sup>21</sup> P. Nolan, 'The Productivity Miracle?', in F. Green, ed., *The Restructuring of the UK Economy*, Hemel Hempstead 1989, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> On attempts to promote flexibility in Britain, see: R. Boyer, ed., *Flexibilité du travail en Europe*, Paris 1986; and J. Rubery, 'Labour Market Flexibility in Britain', in *Restructuring*.

advanced at any given level of interest-rates and any given level of bank reserves. Deregulation has hindered Thatcherism's counter-inflationary strategy and has led to higher interest-rates than would be required in a more closely controlled banking system. Thus, other things being equal, each successive round of tight money would be coupled with higher levels of unemployment, more bankruptcies, and a larger drop in output. This hinders the recovery of the real economy and stimulates the growth of imports to meet upturns in demand. Even so there has been an increasing tendency to overshoot monetary targets.<sup>14</sup>

Second, by encouraging expansion in the financial sector, the neo-liberal strategy has increased financial claims on the 'real' economy. In a period when overall financial investment in global equity markets is increasingly liquidity-driven,<sup>15</sup> the danger arises that manufacturing productivity and industrial profits fail to keep pace with the growth of financial claims. This is especially worrying when other government policies have undermined industrial investment and growth. In response three effects are likely to occur: recurrent mini-crashes as speculative bubbles burst, inflation as wages and industrial profits struggle to compensate for the increased claims from the financial sector, or outward portfolio investment in the search for higher returns. We have already seen the October 1987 crash and a smaller version in 1989; a depressed housing market and high interest-rates to control wage-push inflation; and consistently higher rates of overseas than domestic investment—both direct and portfolio.<sup>16</sup> None of these trends augurs well for the UK economy.

Third, in pursuing its policy of disengagement, the government has systematically run down its role in training and has tried to bring education and R&D activities closer to the market. Yet the recession which it engineered in 1979–81, the proliferation of small businesses and self-employment which it has encouraged, and the high interest-rates which play a key role in its economic strategy have each contributed to the collapse of private-sector training initiatives. At a time when high-grade flexibility depends on polyvalent skills, the government sponsors flexibility through hire-and-fire industrial relations legislation and adopts a low-cost, low-skill training policy. This has reinforced the low-skill, low-wage, low-productivity character of the British economy. Moreover, in continuing the traditional bias of successive British governments towards military and nuclear rather than civil R&D and pushing the latter towards the market, the Thatcher regime has helped retard modernization and hindered competition in high-tech areas. Indeed, whereas both government and private R&D

---

<sup>14</sup> For the analysis underpinning this claim, see E. Miller, *Micro-Economic Effects of Monetary Policy*, Oxford 1978; B. Jessop, 'Prospects for a Corporatist Monetarism', in H. Kastendiek et al., eds., *Economic Crisis, Trade Unions, and the State*, London 1985; and J. Toporowski, 'The Financial System and Capital Accumulation in the 1980s', in *Restructuring*.

<sup>15</sup> This feature derives from Japan's financial surpluses and the de-regulation of US and Japanese investment houses; the Thatcher regime has reinforced it with several acts which encourage funded pension schemes and contractual savings.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Toporowski's analysis in *Restructuring*.



spending has stagnated during the 1980s, its major advanced industrial competitors have all increased their commitment. If the ending of the cold war does indeed lead to reduced spending on the military-industrial complex, then the British and US economies will be particularly disadvantaged in relation to their West German and Japanese competitors. Even British involvement in European-wide R&D projects has tended to be mean and ineffective. As the pace of technological innovation accelerates and ever-new demands are placed on the workforce, this problem will become more severe. And, as Freeman notes, even where the Thatcher government has pursued technology policy, the lack of adequate industrial or education and training policies means that they have limited repercussions.<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, in its drive to promote popular capitalism, the Thatcher regime has acted irrationally not just in economic but also in political terms. It has pursued short-term asset stripping of the public sector for the sake of a 'share-owning democracy', cosmetic reductions in the PSBR, and tax-cuts—all to the detriment of long-term competitiveness and industrial performance. It has sought to maximize revenue through the sale of monopolies rather than to promote competition by breaking them up. It has sought to promote popular capitalism by the deep discounting of shares rather than to secure the best price for the assets it is selling.<sup>18</sup> And, if we look closely at the figures, there is little evidence that the off-loading of firms into the private sector has improved their subsequent performance, once one allows for the more general growth in profits after the 1979–81 recession.<sup>19</sup>

Fifth, by privileging owner-occupation in the hope of electoral benefit, the government certainly gave a major boost to the financial services sector. But it also promoted a consumer boom on the basis of housing equity, aggravated the crowding-out effects of the HSBR (housing sector borrowing requirement) on productive investment, and discouraged regional labour mobility from areas of high unemployment to areas of labour shortage. Moreover, in promoting owner-occupation, it created a big vested interest which could be fickle whenever a downturn in the housing market occurred. This, more than the wider (but not yet very deep) share ownership promoted by the Thatcher regime, could prove to be the Achilles heel of its strategy of popular capitalism. Indeed, given that London and the south-east have higher rates of home-ownership, more expensive properties, and associated debts, the downturn that has already begun could particularly affect the principal geographic, as well as social, base of Thatcherism. It is also possible that rising house prices are a crucial link in

---

<sup>17</sup> The analysis in this paragraph is indebted to: P. Robinson, *The Unbalanced Recovery*, Dedington 1988; C. Freeman, 'R&D, Technical Change, and Investment in Britain', in *Restructuring*; and D. Ashton et al., 'The Training System of British Capitalism: Changes and Prospects', in *Restructuring*.

<sup>18</sup> Whereas the average discount on new share issues in the private sector is 3 per cent, the average discount on privatization issues before British Steel was 14 per cent: cf. Labour Research Department, 'Privatisation Does Nothing for Performance', *Labour Research*, May 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. M.W. Bishop and J.A. Kay, 'Privatization in the United Kingdom: Lessons from Experience', *World Development* 17, 1989.

the wage-price spiral which Thatcherism has not yet managed to defeat.

Sixth, much of the apparent success of the neo-liberal strategy depends on trends in the South-East. In the 'north' it triggered far more job losses in manufacturing (both in absolute and relative terms) than in the 'south'.<sup>20</sup> This came to pass through the combined impact of general macro-economic policies (such as tight money and high exchange-rates) and specific micro-economic measures to restructure nationalized industries (which are over-represented in the 'north'). In contrast, such government policies as internationalization, deregulation, liberalization, privatization and tax cuts were especially advantageous to the City, rentier and producer service interests located above all in London and the South-East. Moreover, with regard to manufacturing, the central role of various low-profile forms of government aid (e.g. airports, research establishments, defence industries, motorways) in the south hardly suggests that neo-liberalism alone could ever drive a real expansion in output. It is overheating in the South-East which has prompted the recent deflationary attempt to engineer a 'soft-landing' for the economy as a whole. The costs to this in future investment in general and growth in more depressed regions in particular have not yet been calculated. Whether manufacturing can recover to the same extent in the North is uncertain—especially with the likely impact of 1992 and the Channel Tunnel in further polarizing growth southwards.<sup>21</sup>

Pulling all these different strands together, we can say that the Thatcher years have been quite distinctive in macro-economic terms. Economic growth has taken the form of a consumption boom financed from borrowing, from dividend and interest incomes, from redundancy payments, and from an increased volume of state benefits (unemployment benefit, pensions). In turn this is linked to a pattern of investment which is skewed towards sectors which service the consumption boom (retailing, distribution, personal financial services and credit) rather than those involved in tradeable commodities. This has been partially disguised by productivity increases in industrial sectors which have reorganized since 1981. But, since manufacturing matters, this is not a sustainable basis for economic recovery. The 'soft landing' hoped for by Lawson and Major is unlikely to secure this.<sup>22</sup>

### How Reversible Are the Effects of Thatcherism?

The failure of Thatcherism has also been apparent in the ways in which it has addressed the limited capacities of the British state, the

---

<sup>20</sup> There were 1.386m job losses in the 'north' between 1979 and 1988 and only 726,000 losses in the 'south': these figures correspond to 34.3 per cent of the northern manufacturing workforce and only 23.2 per cent of the southern. See R. Martin, 'Regional Imbalance as Consequence and Constraint in National Economic Renewal', in *Restructuring*, p. 85.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. D. Smith, *The North-South Divide*, Harmondsworth 1989, and Martin in *Restructuring*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. A. Glyn, 'The Macro-Economy of the Thatcher Years', in *Restructuring*, p. 77.

growth of public squalor, and the social deprivation rooted in the crisis of the welfare state. In all three cases it sometimes seems to have done little more than change the forms in which these problems express themselves and to have redistributed their social and economic costs. The resulting problems are not just waiting for a post-Thatcher government to resolve—they are also bearing down with growing weight on the Thatcher regime itself. Mrs Thatcher is probably worrying whether they can be reversed and we must ask the same question. To answer it properly involves far more than establishing the conditions in which she could be removed from office or her personal political style be checked. Nor is it simply a question of reversing a particular set of policies or a general strategic line. In all these cases it is not too far-fetched to imagine the speedy demise of Thatcherism. The most daunting problems begin when we confront the long-term damage which Thatcherism has done to the economy, the state and civil society.

Obviously the significant material shifts in the state and civil society cannot all be directly attributed to Thatcherism. After all, its stated objective has been to roll back the frontiers of the (social democratic) state and to 'set the people free'—albeit in circumstances of Mrs Thatcher's choosing and always subject to the requirement that they think and act like good entrepreneurs. But, given the massive significance of state power for the overall development of society and the dynamism of the market forces which have been released, the widening ripples of the changing Thatcherite project have materially imprinted many different fields of social life. There is no space to deal with even the most important aspects of these changes and instead we will merely illustrate some of the issues involved.

The most reversible features of the legacy of Thatcherism will be those which derive essentially from the 'iron lady' herself. Anyone who replaces the Prime Minister—whether from the Conservative or the Labour Party—will try to differentiate himself<sup>23</sup> from Mrs Thatcher's style of political leadership. There will also be calls for a return to collective decision-making or even full Cabinet government, with curbs on the arbitrary and authoritarian exercise of *raison d'état* and the politically motivated use of prime ministerial patronage. For the same reason we can expect to see more effective consultation with policy communities, functional bodies, and other affected interests, both before policy is decided and during the process of implementation. This does not mean a return to liberal parliamentarism or to earlier forms of tripartite consultation between government and the peak associations representing unions and business. But it will create a more accountable state with greater political participation at central and local levels as well as across different functional domains. In turn this will help to avoid the half-baked decisions and policy disasters that have so often followed from the Thatcherites' dogmatic imposition

<sup>23</sup> We write 'himself' advisedly. The British political system has long discriminated against women and all leading contenders to replace Mrs Thatcher are male. But even if there were likely women candidates, desire for a change could prove disadvantageous.

of measures from above—measures whose economic damage and/or political fallout had then to be made the subject of crisis management. The poll-tax and uniform business rate, the ambulance workers' dispute of 1989–90, and the total abandonment of the ludicrous proposals to privatize nuclear power provide but three recent examples. Any such moves can only be welcomed.

Many commentators have suggested that two enduring features of Thatcherism are a fundamental rightward shift in the political agenda and a successful campaign to wean 'hearts and minds' from social democratic values. Yet, if the authoritarian populist appeal from above has the flimsy purchase which current (and, indeed, much earlier) evidence suggests, then the changes in general social and political values would seem a particularly weak dimension of Thatcher's revolution.<sup>24</sup> Indeed this has already been recognized by prominent Thatcherites themselves. Spurred by popular reaction against Lawson's give-away budget in 1988, they have waged campaigns to give some religious meaning to Thatcherism, to add the magic ingredient of 'active citizenship', and to encourage the newly rich to act as good Samaritans. As yet these campaigns have met with little success, but this does not exclude shifts in everyday practices and routines with major ideological implications.

Thatcherism, particularly during its radical stage from 1986, has also been pursuing a strategy for the reconstruction of civil society—as if it had taken Gramsci's sage advice to move beyond the economic-corporate stage of revolution to an ethico-political stage in which 'all the superstructures must be developed if one is not to risk the dissolution of the state'.<sup>25</sup> The only problem is that it took a risk and is now losing as the state does indeed start to dissolve. The ideological coherence of the radical strategy has sometimes been tempered by natural prudence and statecraft but, in the first flush of the 1987 general election victory and the 1988 budget, anything seemed possible. One aim has been to underpin changes in the state by linking them to new powers, constraints and social practices at a distance from it. This avoids creating a political vacuum as the state withdraws which might later be filled by forces antagonistic to Thatcherism. If civil society and the economy can be so reorganized that new management systems, modes of operation and objectives are tied to new forms of control, support and incentive exercised by the state, they would form powerful new practical ensembles and social networks which would be hard to unravel. In place of direct intervention through general legislation, bureaucracy, purposive action or central planning, the state would be operating indirectly and at a distance. In fact, it has already been promoting and reinforcing sites of micro-power and social alliances beyond its redrawn boundaries—sites which could well remain long after Thatcherism itself has been rolled back in the central state.

In such key areas as education and health, for example, the government

<sup>24</sup> For the latest review, see: I. Crewe, 'Values the Crusade that Failed', in D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon, eds., *The Thatcher Effect: A Decade of Change*, Oxford 1989.

<sup>25</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London 1971.

is sponsoring reforms to inspire and reinforce financially-driven managements who will subordinate the labour process to 'value for money' criteria and compete with each other for custom. Thus each school will have its own budget and must publish the educational achievements of its pupils; polytechnics have turned to corporate planning and tender on unit costs to win more students; general medical practitioners are given financial incentives to adopt new management systems and to deliver new services; and hospital managements are being encouraged to opt out from local control and turn themselves into autonomous medical service facilities. These shifts could stimulate marked divisions among consumers and clients of the services, with some having strong vested interests in such commodification and others losing out equally strongly. A link between entrepreneurial managers and consumer self-interest could seriously damage our health (and education) by undermining the social bases of collectivism. It is by no means clear that 'third sector' solutions located somewhere between the state and markets can provide anything but marginal alternatives here. For it is the tax state and market forces which have greatest access to the cash resources needed to make this system operate.

It is even harder to envisage the reversal of much privatization and related measures aimed at exposing firms, sectors and the economy as a whole to the harsh winds of global competition. Since privatization, for example, British Telecom has become a leading player in information technology and is now closely and widely integrated into the circuit of international capital. With the approach of 1992 it is even harder to imagine that exchange controls could be reintroduced or financial services be subjected to effective national control. This does not mean that the state could not take some privatized firms back into public or 'social' ownership or devise effective forms of regulation. But we should not overestimate the prospects of a general return to the state fold at a time when flexibility and globalization are important trends.

The list could be continued, but this would not alter the conclusion that not all changes are equally reversible or irreversible. Defeatism is quite inappropriate. It will not help the Left, however, to assume that executive office is itself a sufficient condition to reverse the changes under Thatcherism. Even within the state system many shifts will be hard to alter—let alone the consequences which have already been inscribed within British society and fundamentally altered its place in the changing global order. For the reorganization of the state has also involved redefining its political boundaries and changing how it is coupled to many different sites of power in civil society and economy alike.

### The Social Basis of Thatcherism

The social basis of the post-war settlement had already become fragile in the late 1960s and Thatcherism has been busy trying to give it the

*coup de grâce* since 1979.<sup>26</sup> It has tried to shift from a 'one nation' approach, involving 'jobs for all' and 'social democracy', to a 'two nations' strategy in which its main social basis comprises the beneficiaries of the entrepreneurial society and popular capitalism—above all, the richest groups in Britain or, as Rentoul labels them, the 'have lots'.<sup>27</sup> In 1988–89 alone, the year of Lawson's big tax-cutting budget, the top one per cent of tax units comprising some 210,000 taxpayers) gained a reduction of £4.7bn in their tax bills. In addition the top percentile have seen their pre-tax income increase from 4.9 per cent to 7.0 per cent of total income.<sup>28</sup> Numerically the principal beneficiaries are the new service class (especially its private sector professional and managerial strata engaged in finance, business services and semi-skilled private-sector manual workers in core parts of growth industries. Both groups also have a strong (but not exclusive) regional base in the South, notably London and the growth triangle bounded by Cambridge, Bristol and Southampton.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast there is a growing (if disparate and fragmented) number of people excluded from Thatcher's boom—often as a result of deliberate policies to push down wage-rates or to cut and/or restrict access to welfare benefits. These groups include the long-term unemployed, the new poor primarily dependent on state doles (notably low-income pensioners and single-parent families), and the growing army of peripheral workers involved in the more part-time and/or temporary, flexi-wage, hire-and-fire sectors of the economy. Cuts in benefit to these groups amounted to some £5bn in 1988–89—which more or less paid for tax cuts for the rich.<sup>30</sup> Although 'the poor were always with us' during the era of flawed Fordism as well, they were not marginalized, disprivileged and stigmatized to anywhere near the same extent as they are in the Thatcherite era—nor was this a matter of policy. It is also worth noting that the shift from a 'one nation' to a 'two nations' social basis is reflected in a shift from relatively uniform national swings in elections to a polarization of electoral swings with movement to Labour in Scotland and the North, to the Tories in the Midlands and South.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Social bases refer to the ensemble of social forces with a direct material and/or symbolic stake in the continuation of a specific regime relative to one or more feasible alternatives. They are not fixed and pregiven but can ebb or shift rapidly as alternatives change. It is important not to reduce social bases to a sum of purely class forces or to read off direct political consequences from the character of a social base.

<sup>27</sup> J. Rentoul, *The Rich Get Richer*, London 1987.

<sup>28</sup> F. Field, *Living Out: the Emergence of Britain's Underclass*, Oxford 1989, pp. 70–1.

<sup>29</sup> This argument is reinforced by recent data on council house sales: those who did not purchase were more likely to be working class, in receipt of less than £8000 per annum, not in paid work, and living in Scotland, Wales or the North of England. This means that council houses have been more and more reserved for disadvantaged members of society. There is little evidence that council house purchase and/or the purchase of privatization share issues turns Labour voters into Thatcherites. See A. Heath et al., 'The Extension of Popular Capitalism', paper for Political Studies Association Conference, Warwick, 4–6 April 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Field, *Living Out*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. Curtice, 'North and South: the Growing Divide', *Contemporary Record*, Winter 1988, p. 8.

This emerging social basis has implications for party politics and for government policy after Thatcherism. Labour has faced a basic problem in unifying various categories and forces among the less privileged, whilst the Conservative Party has benefited from the greater coherence of its core support in the 'privileged nation'. As the divisive effects of 'two nations' become clearer, however, this core is also becoming less confident and committed. During the stage of radical Thatcherism rampant, many policies began to hurt its own base economically, socially and politically. We can simply mention the poll tax, the uniform business rate, transport policy, plans for National Health Service reform, proposals for schools to opt out of local authority control, and the collapse of the housing market. From then on, it was in trouble. Moreover, although 'two nations' effects are undeniable, they are far from stable. How far this translates into electoral terms is harder to assess.

Many of the social and economic consequences of 'two nations' will be with us long after Thatcher and Thatcherism have departed the political scene. Exaggerated concern with building political support has produced an unsustainable import boom in consumer goods—which will require drastic action to dampen home demand and divert tradeable goods and services into exports. This will hurt everyone—Mrs Thatcher's 'natural' supporters included. This is already evident in the falling house prices, a squeeze on consumer credit, and continued deterioration in the nation's economic and social infrastructure. As the impact of this becomes clearer in mounting public squalor, doubts are growing about the wisdom of tax cuts and private affluence. This explains why the 1990s have been heralded as the 'decade of caring' and ministers are competing to offer low-cost but politically symbolic concessions—higher pensions for some war widows, compensation for small investors in wake of the Barlow Clowes investment management collapse, and so on.

However, sadly for Thatcherism, the financial and fiscal costs of real rather than symbolic action to reverse more than a decade's damage to the economic and social infrastructure can only be met by direct attacks on the tax gains and subsidies of the middle classes. For, without a major decline in the rate of growth of personal consumption, the investment required to rebuild the manufacturing sector and reverse the trade deficit and inflationary pressures would be impossible. Besides such redistributive consequences, major structural changes must occur in the economy. For the concessions enjoyed by Thatcherism's social base have persisted so long that basic shifts have occurred as firms adapt to the opportunities offered by the 'two nations' society. Moreover, given the general neglect of education and training in the UK, the continued distortion of R&D priorities by the military sector, and the backlog of publicly financed capital expenditure, it would take many years to instal the infrastructure needed to raise the productivity of any given investment.

### From Neo-Liberalism to New Times?

As we noted earlier, *Marxism Today's* editorial focus has shifted from

Thatcherism's ideological dimension to its current economic and political significance for 'New Times'. It now suggests that, just as a series of postwar settlements provided the social and political framework for the glorious boom years of Fordism, a new 'post-recession settlement' is emerging within which 'post-Fordist' patterns of accumulation and regulation will be consolidated. In breaking with the postwar social-democratic settlement and encouraging greater flexibility in a lightly regulated opportunity society, Thatcherism is said to be working with the grain of post-Fordism. Nonetheless it has clear limits here owing to its inability to address the concerns of new social movements and its authoritarian style. On the international plane, the advent of Gorbachev and the accelerating trend towards globalization have supposedly produced a new 'politics of interdependence'—its touchstones including the European Community's project for the single market to be completed by 1992, the dramatic transformations in Eastern Europe, and East-West detente. The stage is thus set for Thatcherism to be replaced, as it proves unable to adapt to these 'New Times' at home and abroad and to lead us towards a democratic future.

We would reply that such views concede too much to Thatcherism. For, although it has certainly given them an ideological gloss, its preferred neo-liberal strategy has hardly been working with the grain of post-Fordist 'New Times'. Mrs Thatcher 'seized the day' when she rode to power on the back of growing disenchantment with the post-war settlement but, once in office, her impact has been more negative than positive. She and her neo-liberal colleagues have proved more adept at rolling back the frontiers of the social-democratic state and the gains of the post-war settlement than at rolling forward a new state able to engage in an international race for modernization in the next long wave of capitalist expansion and to inaugurate a stable 'post-recession settlement'.

Any hegemony which Thatcherism ever enjoyed came from the voice it gave to widespread discontent with the sclerotic, bureaucratic post-war settlement and the effects of economic decline. It later came to enjoy an extensive decisional autonomy through a dual crisis of party politics and functional representation so that it could impose measures without too much regard for building consensus.<sup>32</sup> The peculiarities of the British electoral system and the continuing ability to manipulate the economic conjuncture permitted the Conservatives to win two further general elections. But this decisional autonomy did not mean that the Thatcherites could establish the state capacities required for an advanced capitalist economy in the 1990s. Nor did it mean they could reorganize the underlying economic structures so that the British economy could be inserted into an increasingly post-Fordist, ever more global economy in ways which could sustain full employment and rising living standards. Indeed it was precisely the Thatcherites' continued luck in managing the balance of political forces which meant that the basic irrationality of their policies for any British *perestroika* was ignored by at least some opponents as well as themselves.

---

<sup>32</sup> On the dual crisis, see Jessop et al., *Thatcherism*.



This suggests that the 'New Times' analysis is just as erroneous as the earlier *Marxism Today* view of Thatcherism's hegemonic potential. The link between these errors is the self-admitted conflation of Thatcherism and 'New Times'. In introducing the *New Times* collection, Hall and Jacques write: 'Much of the Left... had failed to distinguish adequately between Thatcherism and the way the world had changed—or, to put it another way, between Thatcherism and the world which Thatcherism claimed to represent and aspired to lead. The two were too easily conflated—a fault to which *Marxism Today* itself, which led the way in the analysis of Thatcherism, must also plead guilty. As a result, the Left failed to recognize the new ground or understand the new world that was being made. That new world and Thatcherism were seen as one and the same thing. The latter, as a consequence, looked omnipotent, as if it were in charge of history.'<sup>33</sup>

But, whilst conceding this error, Hall and Jacques fail to identify two others. First, many commentators still conflate global trends towards post-Fordism and the specific forms which economic restructuring is assuming in particular national modes of growth. Not all economies in the golden Fordist era were themselves predominantly Fordist: others occupied non-Fordist niches which sometimes proved inconsistent with, sometimes complemented, the dominant Fordist dynamic. And even those national economies which had essentially Fordist modes of growth displayed quite contrasting modes of regulation. For Fordism was variously associated with liberal, corporatist and dirigiste modes of state intervention and with quite diverse patterns of social life. Analogous arguments hold for post-Fordism, with the additional and not insignificant problem that arguments about a transition to some distinctive post-Fordist stage of capitalism currently involve little more than speculation. But let us put aside our doubts that such a new stage is possible—let alone actually upon us<sup>34</sup>—and consider what the Fordist era might teach us about it. Past experience suggests that not all economies in the post-Fordist age will become predominantly post-Fordist (except in a trivial chronological sense); nor need those whose mode of growth is predominantly post-Fordist (whatever that might mean) all assume the same general mode of social regulation.

These schematic comments have important implications. For they suggest that the British economy could be moving from a 'flawed Fordism' past to an equally flawed future. Thatcherism has helped to dismantle many elements of Britain's post-war mode of growth but this is far from identical with the sort of 'creative destruction' needed to secure the conditions for a new, more stable mode of growth which would halt further descent within a changing global economic hierarchy. Instead its neo-liberal accumulation strategy seems to have created the conditions for certain fractions of capital operating in and

<sup>33</sup> S. Hall and M. Jacques, 'Introduction', in *idem*, eds., *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, London 1989, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> For doubts about the utility of the concept of post-Fordism, see: Jessop et al., *Thatcherism*, pp. 127–31; and P.Q. Hirst, 'After Henry', in *New Times*. One of the present authors, Simon Bromley, is especially sceptical about the post-Fordist future.

from British economic space to integrate themselves successfully into a global post-Fordist economy. This is clear in the case of an ever more internationalized 'City' and 'producer services' sector servicing global capital, as well as in the UK's attractiveness to multinationals interested in exploiting (and so reinforcing) the low-wage, low-tech and low-investment qualities of the British economy and its proximity to a dynamic European continent. This hardly amounts to creating the conditions for a stable British economy in the 1990s as opposed to increasing the attractions of British economic space for certain firms and activities. In many respects the neo-liberal strategy is actually destroying these conditions.

The second error which has gone uncorrected concerns the social forms of 'New Times'. Even commentators who do distinguish between Thatcherism and 'New Times' often seem to subsume all the many and varied changes in post-modern society under the same catch-all slogan. It may be true that Britain and other advanced capitalist societies are all 'increasingly characterized by diversity, differentiation and fragmentation, rather than homogeneity, standardization and the economies and organizations of scale which characterized modern mass society'.<sup>35</sup> But one should not attribute all these changes to some essential post-modern dynamic. Not only does this exaggerate the novelty and discontinuity of these trends—when what is really at issue is how far they were adequately *expressed* in the dominant discourses of earlier periods; it also suggests that they might have some common origin, whether in post-Fordism or the post-modern spirit. Hall and Jacques now warn their readers of the dangers of exaggerating the novelty of 'New Times', but it is less clear that others have taken note and inwardly digested this caution. They are also well enough versed in post-Marxism to recognize that the complexities of post-modern society have no common ground and that it is only in and through specific discourses that their equivalence can be established. But is it really helpful to emphasize the novelty and equivalence of social movements and to neglect the old and boring survivals of class society and its capitalist dynamic?

## Conclusion

We do not want to end on a pessimistic note or with a seemingly die-hard Marxist insistence on the need for a continued critique of political economy. But we do insist that any attempt to explain the current crisis of Thatcherism must sooner or later engage in that critique. Specifically it must take account of the serious economic and social damage which Thatcherism has done to British society and the political damage which follows from its dismantling of central state infrastructural capacities at the same time as it reinforces the elements of a centralizing 'elective dictatorship'.<sup>36</sup> Whilst criticisms of Thatcherism

<sup>35</sup> Hall and Jacques, 'Introduction', p. II.

<sup>36</sup> As Michael Mann notes, it is important to distinguish between 'infrastructural' and 'despotic' power: the former refers to the state's organizational capacities *within* society, the latter to its dominance *over* society. The two often conflict. See M. Mann, 'The Autonomous Power of the State', *European Archives of Sociology*, 1983.

and its works from the left and the centre have often dealt incisively with its economic failings and/or its attack on civil liberties and political accountability, they have been far less concerned with the steady dismantling of state capacities to guide and correct economic modernization.<sup>37</sup> Yet, without a fundamental reinvigoration of central state capacities to reinforce local, regional and European power centres and policies, time spent on economic programmes and plans for modernization will once again come to naught.

For all these reasons, it is not enough to focus on the changing political scene or the shifts in public opinion about Mrs Thatcher, her government, and its policies to understand current difficulties. The Thatcherite accumulation strategy and its associated hegemonic project always tended to be 'arbitrary, rationalistic and willed' and survived as long as they did for reasons only indirectly related to more fundamental structural changes occurring worldwide. It is not enough to change the immediate balance of forces; its underlying structural determinants must also be transformed.

Now, as we move from the dying years of Fordism, when individual states were mainly concerned with economic crisis-management, to a period of growing national and regional struggle to win the race for 'post-Fordist' modernization, the absence of a 'decisive economic nucleus' to the Thatcherite project becomes daily more evident. Its consequences for the future dynamism of the British economy and for the divisiveness of its 'two nations' strategy will be with us long after Mrs Thatcher falls (or is pushed) off the political stage.

It is far too soon to forecast what the immediate economic conjuncture will be like after the next election: i.e., to guess what will be happening to the levels and trends of unemployment, inflation, output, exchange rate, and so forth. But even though a week is a long time in politics and quarterly figures can fluctuate remarkably in economics, two or three years are quite brief in the structural transformation of a mode of growth. This suggests that the medium-term priorities of any incoming government (whether Labour-led or under a Conservative leader such as Heseltine) must be productivist: concerned with the complex of conditions for economic modernization and the state capacities and popular mobilization that will promote this modernization. This does not mean that social and economic justice and welfare measures will be impossible let alone undesirable. But they must be coupled, where possible, to measures that boost the supply-side in its broadest sense. The Labour Party's Policy Review has gone some way down this road towards 'supply-side socialism', but it has not yet given sufficient attention to the political modernization which is the necessary complement to any such economic programme. Nor should we overlook the local, molecular changes already occurring beneath the personalized rule of Mrs Thatcher. Many local economic initiatives, partnerships and supply-side strategies are currently weakened or even overwhelmed by the neo-liberal framework within which they

---

<sup>37</sup> On the principal changes in state capacities under Thatcherism, see Jessop, 'Thatcherism: the British Road to Post-Fordism?.'

must be pursued. With the support rather than the opposition of a revamped central state, such initiatives and the experience they have generated could provide a boost to economic growth and social productivity. This would be far more significant in the long run than the spurious, short-term boost to productivity enjoyed under Thatcherism.

In conclusion we suggest that radical Thatcherism is decomposing and giving way to a new stage of Thatcherism. But this is not so much a recharged, offensive form as an exhausted, defensive form. We are entering another phase of consolidation—but one in which the government's room for economic manoeuvre is becoming more restricted and there is little scope for shifting the blame. Just as the two preceding periods of Thatcherism in power revealed typical internal divisions among the Conservatives (wets vs. dries, radicals vs. consolidators), so the current period revolves around the conflict between neo-liberal radicals and neo-statist radicals.<sup>58</sup> If the neo-liberals were dominant from October 1986 to May 1989, we are now living through a phase where the balance of forces is more even. Beneath this relative equilibrium, the unfolding structural crisis seems to favour more statist forces within the Conservative Party. Yet their chances of evicting Mrs Thatcher from office before the next election will diminish as it draws nearer. Even so, the nature of the electoral system, the distribution of party political support, and the government's continuing ability to produce a short-term boom still mean that the Labour Party could find it hard to win a majority in the next election. Even if it does, the structural legacy of Thatcherism will remain as a poisoned chalice. Thus, although the balance of political forces seems to be moving in favour of the Left, we cannot yet say 'farewell' to Thatcherism.

---

<sup>58</sup> On this aspect, see Jessop et al., *Thatcherism*, pp. 63–4, 129, 180–2

John Keane

## The Polish Laboratory

Warsaw. Wednesday December 7th. The eighth anniversary of martial law approaches. Foul-smelling fog blankets the city. The battered Russian-made taxi which fetches me from the airport clatters down potholed roads. Rows of grey apartment blocks stand guard, frozen, expressionless. Trams whirr and clang through street crowds. Fur-capped shoppers skelter, wrapped in dour coats of brown, olive-green and grey. Powdered snow swirls through sullen-faced queues for bananas, pork, detergent, bread, chocolate. Trench-coated soldiers. Blue-overalled workers. Frozen silence. Winter. The Polish road to democracy.

The taxi speeds up, jumping every other red light. Its driver, goaded by fears of acute petrol shortages, is hungry for my dollars. Twenty minutes from the airport, we squeal and rattle into Iwicka Street, headquarters of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's first and most successful independent daily newspaper. The building resembles army barracks. I pick my way through its posterred corridors to the office of the editor-in-chief, Adam Michnik. The famous ex-dissident, leading Polish historian, elected deputy in the Sejm and key adviser to the new Solidarity-led government spots me through his half-closed office door. Enshrouded in blue smoke, telephone in hand, he smiles impishly, slams down the telephone and strides in my direction. 'Professor John! Bienvenue!' Then a friendly handshake and bear hug, trimmed by polite cheek kisses.

Time is precious. Michnik is harried by a curious irony of socialism. In 1980 he was described by the Polish authorities as 'the most sinister figure of the Polish counter-revolution'. Later today, after our meeting, he has an appointment with Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the new Prime Minister of Poland.

We fall immediately into sharp political discussion, in French. Michnik fires the opening shot. 'Poland is today the most advanced laboratory in the Soviet bloc. Our country is feeling its way along an evolutionary road from communism to democracy. It is full of potholes and hairpin bends. The twentieth century taught us how to build communist regimes. The trouble is that we don't yet know how to dismantle them.'

## A Democratic Experiment

Michnik isn't pessimistic or melancholy about the difficulty of completing the democratic experiment successfully. He makes it clear that he rejects the narcissistic view, common in the West, that the revolutions in central-eastern Europe demonstrate the 'natural' superiority of western liberal democracy and its guaranteed triumph over totalitarianism in the East. Although the democratic revolution in Poland is not impossible, its course is shaky and outcomes uncertain. Michnik also worries about the seductions of governmental power. He is aware that there are groups in Polish society—ecological initiatives, Christian associations, farmers' organizations and workers' clubs—which already criticize the new government as remote, arrogant, half-blind. They point to the continuing absence of clear, legally formalized guarantees of press and broadcasting freedom. They complain about the tendency for key political decisions to be made through informal negotiations, bargaining behind closed doors and by means of jostling among prestigious leaders. I remind Michnik of Montesquieu's eighteenth-century maxim: 'Constant experience shows that every person invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry that power as far as it will go.'

Michnik twitches, half-nodding in agreement. But the recent formation of a non-communist government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki excites him—justifiably so, since it was originally his idea. On July 3rd, on the eve of the inaugural session of the new Polish parliament, he published a highly influential article, 'Your President, Our Prime Minister'. It proposed the unthinkable: a Solidarity-led coalition government. The proposal was at first criticized widely by many within the democratic opposition, and not only because it conceded the presidency to General Jaruzelski, the tinted-spectacled architect of martial law. The chief argument was that Solidarity would end up as a loser in the game of cleaning up the economic mess left by successive communist governments.

Michnik's proposal for a governmental alliance between Solidarity and the Polish United Workers' Party quickly triumphed—despite such objections. He isn't surprised by the breathtaking pace at which military and party rule crumbled. He explains that communists who feel at home in the *nomenklatura* system are notoriously bad at playing politics in the open. They are lazy and incompetent politicians, unable to see that winning the trust of citizens involves more than giving orders. Their judgement is poor, their common sense is in short supply and they quickly lose their nerve. On top of that, Michnik says, martial law was doomed from the outset because it could never solve the terminal crisis of communist regimes. The Polish events of the past decade contain a lesson for all communist generals who dream of becoming dictators. 'Military governments cannot sit on their own bayonets.' Michnik speaks passionately, with the wise militancy of a man who spent six years in prison for his democratic beliefs. 'Although armed to the teeth, military governments are weak because they usually don't have the support of civil society. For eight years Jaruzelski was paralysed by his insistence that

✓ Solidarity didn't exist. All his actions against us resembled the tragicomical efforts of Xerxes to defeat the sea by doing battle with it.'

In Michnik's view martial law—'totalitarianism with broken teeth'—was further paralysed by mounting economic corruption and decay. The architects of martial law failed to see that democracy is a vital precondition of economic reform and prosperity. The formula is straightforward: No free elections and legally guaranteed civil society, no democracy; no democracy, no bread or butter or decent vegetables or meat in the shops. The grim consequence of this rule is that shortages of basic commodities are now rampant in Poland. Each month inflation approaches 100 per cent. Speculation and black market profiteering are widespread. The level of foreign debt (US\$38 billion) is frightening. The standard of living is plummeting dangerously. Environmental damage is massive. And this winter widespread pauperization could scar the face of Poland's young democratic government.

Michnik likens the Polish laboratory to the peaceful transition to democracy in Spain. I shuffle restlessly through my notes, looking puzzled. I suggest to him that the Spanish economy thrived at the end of the Franco dictatorship. By contrast, the Polish economy is utterly ruined. Doesn't Poland today better resemble Chile after Salvador Allende's election victory? Like Mazowiecki, Allende didn't control the army, the security police, the communications system or the economy. And the population of Chile, like that of Poland, was starved of simple daily necessities. Militaries cannot sit on their own bayonets. ✓ But can democratic governments sit on their hungry citizens? 'I know only one thing', says Michnik sharply. 'We must do absolutely everything to halt the slide in the standard of living. Unless a tiny silver lining appears in the dark economic skies very soon, the whole system may quickly go bust. That is why we are going to defend the interests of the working class. At the same time we are taking steps to change political and legislative practices so that people will be inspired to work harder. And we are sending off signals to the world to encourage it to assist Poland. Walesa's recent initiatives in the United States, Canada and Britain are an effort to move in this direction.'

It is true that Poland is already attracting new foreign investment. Recent examples include major extensions to Warsaw airport, to be ✓ carried out by the West German construction firm, Hochtiefbau, financed by loans from the US Citibank and guaranteed by Hermes, the West German state credit guarantee concern; and the joint venture of Trust House Forte and Orbis, the Polish state-owned tourist company, to renovate and operate the Bristol Hotel in Warsaw. Poland is also targeted by various foreign aid and loan programmes. ✓ EEC officials have recently confirmed further contributions to a 'currency stabilization fund' for Poland, aimed at bolstering confidence among bankers and foreign investors. Its provision is to be ✓ coordinated with the International Monetary Fund, which itself agreed a loan deal with the Mazowiecki government in early January 1990. The IMF agreement compels the government to pursue an ✓ incomes policy and tight monetary policy in exchange for a US\$725

million bridging loan supplied by the United States and the Basle-based Bank for International Settlements. A further US\$1.67 billion worth of loans has been pencilled in by the World Bank for disbursement over the next eighteen months. And the EEC, aiming to stimulate an economic boom in central-eastern Europe, is planning to set up a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and is expected this year to approve a further grant in food aid to Poland.

### The New Entrepreneurs

As Michnik speaks my thoughts wander. I am struck by the enormity of the structural economic problems facing the fledgling Polish democracy. Michnik doesn't mention the emergence of the new private economic monopolies. Large privatized firms such as Dolnel in Wroclaw are not only likely to use their monopoly power to hinder technical innovation and the formation of competitive market structures. Their power freely to determine working conditions, employment levels, prices and the quality of goods and services is also likely to frustrate Solidarity's hopes for a just, democratic and economically productive Poland. The current privatization programme is opening the way for Party and state bureaucrats to swap their former *nomenklatura* role for private positions of managerial and entrepreneurial power. Communist bosses are becoming private entrepreneurs! Booty capitalism is replacing communist corruption! A well-known example is Mieczyslaw Wilczek, a figure who could have stepped out of a Balzac novel. He first occupied senior managerial posts in state industry. Later, he founded a highly profitable fur company through a private Polish-Canadian joint venture. Today he is a member of the Party, its treasurer and a millionaire. Solidarity's election programme warned against figures like him. But nothing is being done to counteract their rise to power.

Then there is a serious—barely recognized—long-term dilemma facing the Solidarity-led government. Stalinism begat industrialization in Poland. Its unwanted child was Solidarity—the first ever modern social movement of workers opposed to state despotism. Yet Solidarity has inherited an industrial system which is historically obsolete. Its Taylorist production and distribution methods are inefficient, decrepit and wasteful of energy. How therefore can a Solidarity-led government modernize this system—by stimulating the adoption of new information technologies and flexible production methods, for example—without destroying its very basis of support among industrial workers and their households and communities?

My daydream snaps. Michnik's expressed support for Polish workers prompts me to ask him whether their loyalty can be maintained even in the short run. How can a Solidarity-led government defend the interests of Polish workers while imposing a tough austerity programme on them? The 'economic rescue programme', outlined by Finance Minister Balcerowicz in early October, involves wage restrictions and massive cuts in state spending. It scraps food subsidies (which has had the curious effect of fuelling inflation, slackening demand for food as real wages fall, and reducing the income of many



farmers). The programme also urges state enterprises to make a profit. Bankruptcy is considered an essential ingredient in the fight against politically distorted investment and pricing. Unemployment will naturally result. During 1990 it is expected officially to rise to 20 per cent.

Michnik denies that Solidarity's rescue programme has anything to do with the 'restoration of capitalism'. The old language of 'capitalism versus socialism' is exhausted. 'Coming out of the Stalinist era, we have brought with us a whole bag of labels and stereotypes, one of which is the great perennial conflict between capitalism and socialism. As if there have been no long-lasting feuds and bloody conflicts between socialist countries! We are trying to make our economy effective, and I think no one today has a recipe that can help protect any economy against the detrimental effect of totalitarian methods of management. In the absence of such a programme, dogmas will impede our economic development. I am convinced that all the great ideologies of the past should be abandoned to the past.'

Michnik does admit that the rescue programme puts pressure on the old idea of Solidarity as the defender of civil society against the totalitarian state. In effect, it requires Polish workers to look beyond their noses, to distinguish between their short-term and long-term interests. A trade union role for Solidarity is not enough. Michnik doubts that Solidarity can or should become a political party in the western sense. 'The multiparty system of Western countries is the child of bourgeois revolutions. But we have an entirely different situation, where building exclusively on other countries' experience will not bring about the desired result. Among the political trends in this country you will certainly find Constitutional Democrats, Social Democrats and even Christian Democrats. But distinguishing among them today is difficult, even impossible, since the process of social renewal and polarization is taking place against a different social background and stems from a mass psychology without precedent in history.' Michnik nevertheless emphasizes that the strategy of Solidarity under martial law is no longer viable. It must recognize that citizens have problems distinct from those of workers or consumers, and that the task of democratizing the state and civil society cannot be resolved into the struggle for economic democracy. It is now faced with a new dilemma. 'Solidarity needs to be both a trade union and a citizens' movement. A trade union which has to decide everything cannot remain a trade union for long. Political questions can only be expressed through a citizens' movement.'

Michnik detects confirmation of this point in the citizens' committees which mushroomed prior to the June elections. He believes Polish society has a genuine capacity for dignified self-sacrifice, for solidarity in conditions of extreme austerity. The image of Poles as impassive, tired-looking people who get no fun out of life is mistaken. The Polish spring a decade ago was a watershed. It cut the thread of helplessness in Polish society. 'The 1980-81 events were a revolution for dignity, a celebration of the rights of the vertebrae, a permanent victory for the straightened spine', says Michnik. 'Whatever happens from hereon,

one fact cannot be erased from the memory of the Polish nation: The events of 1917 signalled the rise of communism. The meeting of Gdansk workers in August 1980 signalled its destruction. The downfall of the totalitarian communist order began here in Poland.'

### A Springtime of Nations

Michnik's description is correct. The Poles' love of democracy has been infectious. The national 'revolutions' against communism have spread. Democratic ideals are winning an epochal victory against totalitarian regimes. He is jubilant about the current springtime of nations in central-eastern Europe, and has worked hard to give it a democratic twist. In November 1989 he helped organize a Polish-Czechoslovak jamboree in Wroclaw, attended by more than 6,000 people. For a long time he was convinced that Poland's and Hungary's striving for democracy could be successful only if the dismal wedge of conservative Czechoslovakia wasn't driven between them. With me he is contemptuously funny about the deposed Jakes leadership. 'Do you know why the Jakes group consistently lived up to their self-image?' He smiles, his eyes twinkling with the Marx Brothers. 'Because they looked stupid, acted stupidly and were stupid.' Inevitably, we discuss the two Germanies. Michnik brushes aside talk of the possible emergence of a Fourth Reich with statues of Hitler in every German town. He denies the claim that the recent destruction of the Berlin Wall is dangerous because it is the harbinger of a unified Bismarckian German state in the heart of Europe. In his view an increasingly united, federated Germany—a democratic Germany which acknowledges the existing borders of Poland—could be the magnet which attracted a larger, more democratic Europe. 'The citizens of both Germanies are entitled to exercise their right to determine their own destiny.' Emphasizing the grave dangers of redrawing national boundaries—'anyone who speaks of altering national boundaries is either a fool or a troublemaker'—he extends the same principle of democratic self-determination to the nations of the Soviet Union itself. In September 1989, Michnik visited the Ukraine with a Solidarity delegation. He told the first congress of the Popular Front, to wild applause, that Solidarity was watching with joy the rebirth of the Ukraine, concluding: 'Long live an independent and democratic Ukraine!'

In Poland Michnik's speech was hotly contested. What business do Poles have in Soviet affairs, some asked? Could the Soviet Union survive a day without the Ukraine? And doesn't the nineteenth-century belief that national interests are essentially incompatible still apply? What is good for Ukrainians is bad for the Poles, isn't it? Michnik replies: 'The right of a nation to freedom and a sovereign state is a precondition of democracy within its borders.' A persuasive point. The striving for democracy does demand recognition of at least some rights of self-determination of a nation. And it is true that a shared sense of nationhood—in Poland as much as in the Baltic countries and Armenia—can infuse citizens with a sense of confidence and dignity.

But I ask Michnik whether a strong sense of nationhood is exposed to the well-known dangers of nationalism—especially in middle Europe, where it was the original mass political ideology of the region, and where (as the Polish historian Jan Josef Lipski has pointed out) the cultural vacuum left by the communist attempt to root out other traditions has actually stimulated its growth. Isn't the crucial trait of a nation—a large collection of people who identify primarily with the amorphous collectivity and not with its sub-groups—potentially a menace to democracy? Isn't the striving for nationhood sometimes the soil which sprouts nationalism and hence, insularity, xenophobia and the love of knives and guns and state power? Michnik erupts. 'Categorically no! Chauvinism is the greatest enemy of democracy. But there's no necessary link between the striving for national sovereignty and nationalist attempts to exploit the mythology of xenophobia. On the contrary—as the Pamyat movement in Russia shows—nationalism thrives within nations which have been degraded.' He pauses. 'Whenever there is a thaw in the countries of central-eastern Europe democratic attitudes and ideals normally flourish. This occurred in 1956 in Hungary, in 1968 in Czechoslovakia, and in 1980 in Poland. It is also evident in my country, in Hungary, the DDR, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic Republics, and in Russia itself.'

Russia. Talk of this country and its Empire normally makes Poles' flesh creep. Not so with Michnik, who sees an inverse relationship between democracy and militarism. 'The Russia we have always feared, and which we fear even now, is a country whose autocratic political system is doomed to expansionism. A democratic Russia can establish entirely different relations with Poland.' He is sure that a democratic Russia could coexist peacefully with democratically established states in central Europe. But he is less certain whether the Gorbachev group has in fact swapped the Brezhnev doctrine for the Sinatra doctrine. Can it help build a new and more equal compromise among the nationalities of the Soviet Union? Will it permit Hungary to break the Warsaw Treaty? Czechoslovakia to abandon COMECON? Turn a blind eye to the integration of the two Germanies? Allow Poland—in Churchill's words—to become 'mistress in her own house and captain of her own soul'?

It is too early to tell, says Michnik. He is certain of only one thing. The Soviet Union is the last great empire on the face of the earth. It is crumbling. It contains many countries and national minorities who are the natural foes of totalitarianism. If there is to be (in Gorbachev's words) 'an end to strife between nationalities' then there must be a brand new political compromise, says Michnik. Military solutions and Schmittian talk of revenge, friends and enemies must be avoided. The road to democracy is through give and take. 'Gorbachev is confronted by a fundamental choice. Either he acknowledges that there are irremovable conflicts within Soviet society and, accordingly, works to build a social order based on compromise—among Tatars, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Georgians and other minorities—or he attempts to resolve these conflicts by using the police and the army. There is no other choice: either there will be compromise or Stalinism. I urge him to find agreement with the genuine leaders of the

national minorities. He must try to build a new Soviet commonwealth of nations. Andrei Sakharov was right: freedom in Russia is possible / only if it no longer oppresses other nations.'

Five o'clock approaches. Michnik becomes visibly nervous, torn among his roles as intellectual critic of power, editor-in-chief, adviser and tenant in the house of political power. A taxi appears in Iwicka Street. Michnik issues a barrage of staccato instructions to the staff of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. I grab my equipment and we climb noisily into the taxi. Shrouded in fog, it roars and rattles the short journey to the Prime Minister's offices. I can't resist a string of parting questions. How long will this new government of Mazowiecki last? Can it retain public trust beyond the June local elections (as Walesa and others have asked)? Is it fated to be replaced by a dictatorship, perhaps led ✓ by a new Pilsudski figure such as General Jaruzelski? Or do such questions reinforce a doomsday scenario which actually produces doomsday? Michnik's parting shot is predictably guarded. 'Democracy is ✓ an awful way of running things. It is a costly and time-consuming kind of government. But nobody has yet come forward with a better idea. So I fight for more of it. Salut Professor John! À bientôt.'

## Collets

### The Book People of the Left

#### COLLETS INTERNATIONAL SHOP

129-131 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0EQ  
Telephone: [01] 734 0782/3

The very best of general books, especially British & foreign fiction. The broadest spectrum of books, journals & pamphlets on all aspects of politics, economics, social science & the labour and trade union movement. Russian & Slavonic literature, teaching & learning aids. Travel & guide-books from & about the USSR & Eastern Europe. Art books from the USSR. EFL & Open University textbooks. Third world, gay & feminist politics, ecology & peace publications. Classical records & sheet music from the USSR. Folk music dept. & songbooks. Political posters & badges.

#### COLLETS PENGUIN BOOKSHOP

64-66 Charing Cross Road  
London WC2H 0BD. Tel: [01] 636 6303  
Most Penguins, Pelicans & Puffins in print. Secondhand science section. Reference, travel, & cookery books. The best of modern fiction.

#### COLLETS CHINESE BOOKSHOP & GALLERY

40 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3PJ  
Tel: [01] 580 7638  
Books in Chinese & English from & about China. Chinese language aids & oriental art books. Traditional Chinese handicrafts & works of art; antiques, prints, jewellery, porcelain and embroideries. Chinese artists' materials.

MAIL ORDERS WELCOME

## *interview*

Petr Uhl

# The Fight for a Socialist Democracy in Czechoslovakia

*From 1968, when you were the first person to be tried and sentenced after the Soviet invasion, right up to the present, when you were one of the last to be released from prison in November 1989, you have always sought to combine a militant defence of human rights with a firm rejection of the 'other', capitalist camp. Has this been a difficult path to follow?*

As I explained recently at a meeting of former political prisoners, most of whom were violently anti-communist, I am a Trotskyist and revolutionary Marxist and this is the driving force of my commitment. As I see it, there is no socialism without human rights. My Marxism certainly does not seem to have been seen by the authorities as an extenuating circumstance: witness all the time I have spent in prison over the past twenty years. Of course, it is always possible to treat it as an odd quirk or an aberration. But it is harder to say that for my activity—the pamphlets and agitational work among young people in the late sixties, then my involvement in Charter 77 and

VONS, my work defending political prisoners and fighting for wider freedom of thought. All of that is generally recognized, so people respect what motivates that kind of activity, whether it be religious belief or Marxist conviction. We Chartists are in fact very diverse. There are those like me who saw the Charter as a step in the direction of political revolution, while others saw it as a way of disseminating the word of Christ. We respected one another, indeed there was a veritable laboratory of tolerance among the differing viewpoints of people all involved *actively* in the struggle. Outside, things were rather different.

*Perhaps that is how things were in the past, among the Charter 77 militants. But will the same be true for the mass of people entering politics in the present period? Even though you have spent more time than most in prison—four years for Trotskyism and five for human rights activism, I believe, not to speak of numerous short periods of detention—will people not hold your stubborn Marxism against you, seeing it as a congenital inability to break radically with the system, whereas the anti-communists for their part do seem to have made a clean break?*

But that is not true! They have not made the kind of clean break you mean. On the contrary, many of them are advocates of an authoritarian system. They want to calm the revolutionary upsurge, in order to put through their economic 'reform'. There is also a race for ministerial or parliamentary posts, with the help of anti-democratic procedures. For the moment I criticize all this politely, as it were, because the old order is not yet defeated. But is this not the proof that my Marxism is more radical than their anti-communism? There is something very important at stake here: the emancipation of the individual, the transformation of object into subject, not just on the economic but also on the political level. I do not want to discuss the words 'socialism' or 'Marxism', but human emancipation as the precondition for social emancipation.

*Yes, but even if decades of Stalinism have corrupted political discourse and made words like democracy and socialism equivocal, to say the least, thought is still unthinkable without words. Moreover, behind the problem of definitions, is there not a more substantial problem? In the Soviet Union, for example, there are plenty of people who talk about defending the interests of the workers, fighting corruption, even building socialism, but who unfortunately are only too often linked directly or indirectly to the existing bureaucratic apparatus. On the other hand, those committed to defending democratic freedoms, fighting for national sovereignty, enhancing the right to initiative and responsibility, in short to a radical break with the old order, are only too often convinced that salvation lies only in the development of a capitalist market. In other words, there are very few people who consciously reject both the capitalist and the conservative options. In the German Democratic Republic, by contrast, advocates of that kind of 'third way' seem to be more numerous. What is the situation in Czechoslovakia?*

The bureaucratization of society has never gone so far in our country as in the USSR. From that point of view, the situation may be more like in the GDR, but it is hard to say much more than this since the

big economic discussion has not really started yet. In my opinion, the market has to be able to develop further in Czechoslovakia. This may perhaps seem like a regression, in relation to the communist ideal of a classless society, but I think it is an inevitable stage today. Of course, I am in favour of a plan worked out *democratically*, to determine the overall balance of priorities; but we must beware of the illusion that this could govern production down to the last detail. Only a market can allow the consumer real freedom of choice so far as clothes, shoes and so on are concerned. You will tell me that the problem lies in knowing how far the market can be allowed to impose its laws, how many workers should be employed per enterprise in the private sector, and so on. It is certainly hard to codify all that. But precisely because I regard a certain development of the market as indispensable, I would say the central question is that of democratic control and the practical forms in which workers' self-management is exercised. This is all the more true when we are dealing with foreign capital investments. Poland, after all, must have received a colossal foreign contribution to have the debts it has; apparently, however, in the absence of any control by the workers or consumers this brought it little benefit.

Unfortunately, there is small sign in Czechoslovakia of any worked-out conception of economic and political self-management. So far as the opposite conception is concerned, however, which aims to privatize medium and large-scale production, although this has on more than one occasion been evoked obliquely, it has never been discussed head on. That will start during the campaign for the legislative elections and continue thereafter. All the recently established political parties will have to take up a position on this issue. As for the workers in the enterprises, I am convinced that they will oppose privatization and domination of the Czechoslovak economy by Western capitalism, if this attacks their standard of living and working conditions and produces social differentiation. I think this is where the struggle for socialism is finally going to begin.

The question of ownership of the means of production, and the power to dispose of them, is very important for me. The day after I got out of prison last time on 26 November 1989, there was a meeting of the Plenum of the Civic Forum's Coordinating Centre in Prague (this was before the Coordinating Council existed) and a programme for Civic Forum was adopted. There were four of us who voted against it, five abstentions and sixty in favour. I opposed it mainly because of *one sentence* (you could have an argument about others, but they were not so important): the one stipulating that all forms of ownership of the means of production were equal. I asked myself whether the form of ownership in which the Politburo, or the Party or State leadership, decides everything and the working people have no power was equal to the form of a cooperative employing, say, twenty people deciding jointly about the product, their working conditions, etc. If these two forms are equal, then theft and crime are equal to honest work. I cannot agree with that. Of course, put that way, nobody in Czechoslovakia would agree that all forms of ownership were equal. The truth is that the formulation is there to legitimize private ownership.

*And you played the innocent?*

Of course! And an odd thing was that it was included in the draft for the future Constitution, in an even stranger form. Just imagine, there is not a word about the political system, it could even in theory be a monarchy; not a word about the Federal Assembly, about elections or about the President of the Republic; but the phrase about the forms of ownership of the means of production being equal is there. That was not forgotten. People must have felt strongly about it. Despite this, I think the great majority is clearly against privatization of the big enterprises. There are doubts about medium enterprises, and almost everybody including me is for economic freedom for craftsmen, family firms and so on. That is almost a technical necessity. But, I repeat, the real problem does not lie in the number of workers or employees in this sector, but in the question of who controls the economy as it opens up to Western capital. That is the real danger, because in Czechoslovakia there is nobody who could buy up the enterprises.

*Despite your disagreements, you are a member of the Coordinating Council of the Democratic Forum?*

No, the Civic Forum! Your slip is interesting because, you know, our Forum is not so democratic. It is civic and you might even say amateur, but not really democratic. Given that, two days after the debate on the programme, when I read in another Civic Forum statement that no one agreeing with the programme could be excluded from the movement, I posed the question: does this mean, vice versa, that anyone disagreeing with the programme is excluded from the movement? But in fact, though everyone knows I am against that formulation and in spite of that, I was elected yesterday to the 31-strong Coordinating Council of the Forum. Moreover, I am not the only dissident: in the collective of a hundred or so people which makes up the Civic Forum, there is a small left wing that is certainly going to oppose that thesis.

*It is certainly a great honour to be a member of the Council, but it also must represent a huge burden of work, judging even by the difficulty we had in finding time to have this discussion at 2 in the morning and your telephone that never stops ringing. You have just given a big interview to Tvorba about Left Alternative. What are the different groupings now operating, and what role will Civic Forum play in the coming elections?*

Left Alternative was set up before 17 November. We only finalized our theses after that date, but they had been written earlier. By an odd chance, we voted on them on 18 November, a few hours before my arrest. Left Alternative—like the Children of Bohemia, who are monarchists, or the Association of Anarchists—is part of a burgeoning of new and mostly marginal groupings which are appearing by the score throughout the country. Some groups are larger, with hundreds or even thousands of members: there are the Social Democrats, who have three or even four groups if you include Slovakia; there is the Green Party or rather the green parties; then there is the Christian Democrat Party; and finally there is Democratic Initiative, who call



themselves liberals. I think these last are the most dangerous of all; they are determined at all costs to be an integral part of the Civic Forum and to have a member on the Council. They have just managed to achieve this, and someone was pointing out to me only today how odd it was: all the other people in Civic Forum wear sweaters and call each other *ty*, but those gentlemen wear ties and say *vy*. They are seen as a bit weird, but even so everyone treats them with proper respect.

The big struggles will begin during the legislative election campaign. But I see another danger for Civic Forum, which is to repeat the electoral process of the Poles. In Poland it was not wrong, indeed in the circumstances it was a necessity; but nothing obliges us here in Czechoslovakia to fight the same kind of election as in Poland, by putting up a single Civic Forum candidate in each constituency. In that event, no other candidate would stand a chance. We might do better not to put up Civic Forum candidates as such at all, but simply to support all those advocating a democratic system in the broad sense. It would also be possible to put up several Civic Forum candidates, three or four representing different parties or currents of opinion. Of course, in that case too parties not recognized by the Forum would stand very little chance.

*Do you mean that these would be either parties linked to the old order or far-right, even fascist ones?*

We should be careful before we eliminate everything linked however distantly to the old order. If, for example, you take the Socialist Party or the Popular Party, they were of course linked to the old order since they formed an integral part of it; but you cannot throw them out, because they were our allies right from the start of the overturn—indeed, the Socialists had helped us even before November—and they have already carried out purges in their own ranks. Even take the Communist Party: the Democratic Forum has been established within it, I do not know how many members it has, but even though it remains inside the Party its slogans and outlook are quite acceptable, genuinely democratic, and I think they will have some chance in the forthcoming elections, especially if they do distinguish themselves from the CP. But in that case, what will be left of the old Party? And one other thing before we return to the elections, about relations between Civic Forum and members of the CP. In the Coordinating Centre in Prague, so far as I know there is no member of the Party. There were some initially, but they became ministers—Komarek, for example. In the provinces, on the other hand, Party members are very often in the leadership of the local Civic Forums. Indeed, it was Civic Forum which put forward Party members to make up the last Federal government.

In a nutshell, Civic Forum must guarantee the democratic nature of the forthcoming elections; it must take part in all the commissions that will prepare and control them and scrutinize the results; it must ensure popular control from below; but it must not behave like a political party, which it is not. That would be a mistake and a serious one, flowing from a desire on the part of many people to insert

themselves into the system *as it is*. You can see how the original demand that the interior minister, for example, should not be a Communist was quickly replaced by the demand that ministry X should be occupied by Mr Y. Even then, at first this Mr Y would not be one of us, but that soon changed into a different Mr Y who *was* one of us. We are now putting forward our own candidates to seats in the Assembly, for which deputies are going to be coopted on a provisional basis, perhaps for six months. This is an anti-democratic situation: nobody will be able to recall them, because nobody will have elected them, whereas the old deputies were recallable by their electors. It is paradoxical, to say the least!

*Can you go a bit further into what Civic Forum really is. Who can belong to it? How is it linked with whatever is going on in the enterprises?*

I think we are at present passing through a revolutionary period. There are no precise rules. In practice, the Coordinating Centre of the Civic Forum in Prague is the thirty-one members of the Council plus the apparatus, dare I call it that: in other words, all the unpaid helpers, who number between one and two hundred. This Centre is based on Civic Forums in the neighbourhoods—Prague is divided into ten boroughs—and on the Coordinating Centre of the city of Prague, which is distinct from our national centre. In the provinces, the situation is very uneven. For example, there are areas or enterprises where a third of the people have registered as members of Civic Forum. Elsewhere, the Forum is made up only of a few individuals, but the support for them is clear from the numbers attending meetings. There are also Civic Forums in the army.

There are more than 10,000 strike committees in the country as a whole. These sometimes exist alongside Civic Forum in the enterprise, sometimes the two are identical. There is an Association of Strike Committees, whose function is rather different from that of the Forum. They have a syndicalist line, not with the idea of launching strikes now, but rather of maintaining, as it were, a state of alert. The strike committees set themselves the task of carrying out a purge of the trade unions. The Central Trade Union Council has gone; it has been replaced by an Action Committee which wanted to reform the trade unions, but the workers did not accept that, they are going to create a new trade-union structure—using, of course, the existing buildings and infrastructure. They want to recover what belongs to them, but to change the statutes and not just individuals as the Action Committee wanted. This is a syndicalist line very close to self-management. Six months or a year ago, all enterprises in Czechoslovakia became state enterprises no longer under national administration, endowed with statutes according them greater autonomy than before. Direct dependency on the ministry was replaced by a dual dependency of management upon the ministry and upon the workers. A system of workers' control termed 'self-management' was formally introduced. This could be effective if the workers really believed in it. But in general they have interpreted it as a trick by the authorities, so if they have elected anybody, they have done so with a great deal of mistrust. Nevertheless, in certain enterprises—a small minority, no

more than 5 or 10 per cent—councils have been democratically elected, and these now coincide with the strike committees. What is interesting is that even where this was not the case, the strike committees often want to carry out a purge and replace the whole self-management system. Having said that, since all eyes are now mainly fixed on what lies ahead in the strictly political sphere—presidential and legislative elections and so on—all this is tending to escape general attention.

*Are the strike committees represented in Civic Forum?*

Yes and no. In the first place, the Coordinating Centre of the Civic Forum has a commission for 'liaison with workers', and the person in charge of this is also a member of the Council. In addition, there is a workers' representative as such on the Council, Lis, but unfortunately he is a friend of another worker—Petr Miller—who has in the meantime become minister of labour and social affairs, and who strikes me so far as a bit of a demagogue. So there is no direct representative of the Association of Strike Committees, though, of course, Lis is in contact with them. There are also students' and cultural workers' representatives on the Council. But, for the moment, there is no clear distinction between a civic or political current and a current more directly linked with the workers. We all work together.

*This is a key question. In Poland, for example, one could say that by contrast there is a clear separation, if not yet an open break, between the 'political' current that is now in the government and a wing of Solidarnosc more directly linked to the enterprises.*

But, you know, in our factories the workers are more concerned just now with things like the election of Havel than with directly economic or social questions. It must be said that the economic situation here may not be brilliant, but it is far from being as alarming for the workers as it is in Poland.

*To return to more directly political questions, you were mentioning the Socialist Party which helped you even before November. How would you characterize it and its constituency?*

The Socialist Party is not very socialist. It is the descendant of Benes's old National Socialist Party, which used to invoke the name of Masaryk although Masaryk himself actually supported the Social Democrats. You could situate it somewhere between a social-democratic and a liberal party. It was always a party of the intelligentsia, skilled workers, craftsmen and members of the liberal professions with socialist leanings. Perhaps you could call them advocates of the 'Swedish model', if that still means anything. They had about 18,000 members and 16 deputies before 17 November. Today they may have two or three times that number, I cannot say exactly. A real boom!

From our point of view, the Social-Democrat Party may be more interesting. It is now in the process of renewal and refers back to

former traditions well to the left of the Socialist Party's. Just the opposite of how things are in the West, you see!

*You were speaking just now about Civic Forum's relatively open attitude towards the Democratic Forum grouping inside the Communist Party. How do you interpret that? A desire to compromise, or a readiness to distinguish between bureaucrats and Stalinists on the one hand and communists considered to be honest on the other?*

It is hard to interpret. The desire for compromise is greater in Prague, whereas in the countryside there is a different problem: as there are very few qualified people to take responsibilities, Party members tend to come to the fore. This causes considerable friction, with the more anti-communist people saying that nobody who was in the Communist Party has the right to be in the leadership of Civic Forum. That kind of view does not exist in Prague.

*How do you see your activity now? Is there no problem in being a leading member of Civic Forum at the same time as a founder of Left Alternative?*

There is no contradiction for me. Other currents too are represented in the Forum. Even when they are large, which is far from being the case with us, they want to be there not just as individuals but as a current—which may pose a problem, since we do not want the Forum to become a second National Front. That said, I have very little time at present to concern myself with Left Alternative and have to leave that to my comrades. I hope I shall be able to step up my involvement again in a few weeks, when things are less chaotic in the Forum, and also in the new information agency we have set up on Eastern Europe. That will allow us to take an active part in the election campaign. The aim is to get our ideas across to the public at large, in order to have some influence on political and above all economic developments. It is important that a force should emerge capable of showing the dangers that flow from pro-capitalist conceptions (even though such a characterization is a bit simplistic, I think). Of course, those who advocate them cannot (yet?) go very far. They have to respect a certain idea of social justice, the rights of workers, etc. Our role in any case will be to make sure this respect is maintained, by defending everything that goes in the direction of self-organization by the producers.

But, from a practical point of view, how can you get your ideas across to a wider public? Left Alternative does not as yet have the means to establish a regular press of its own. By collaborating with other groups not necessarily sharing all your views, could you not try to establish a non-sectarian, pluralist publication within a broadly socialist framework? Would such a publication not have a certain resonance?

We have thought of that and have even made contact with a group calling itself Socialist Forum, but they are even smaller than we are. Of course, there is also Democratic Forum, made up of members of the Communist Party, which is far larger. The problem is that we do not want to lose our soul, if I can put it like that. We may be small,

but our political strength lies in the fact that none of us is linked to the old regime. Many of us have suffered repression. We can say: take our ideas in conjunction with the way we have conducted our lives. Thus what we put forward represents a political logic reinforced by a moral strength, something which the members of Democratic Forum cannot claim. We have to be careful. There would be less problem with the Social Democrats, but they are in the throes of reorganization and have a lot of unresolved internal problems. Everything is happening very fast at present, you see, and any definite answers on possible alliances would prove illusory.

## **REALISM AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES 1990 CONFERENCE**

**Southampton University  
7-10 September 1990**

This is the 6th annual conference in a series concerned with the nature of realist philosophy and its relationship to the human sciences and practical activity. Speakers at previous conference have included Michèle Barrett, Ted Benton, Roy Bhaskar, Alan Chalmers, Norman Geras, Russell Keat, Hilary Rose, Mike Rustin and Kate Soper.

**The theme of the 1990 conference is  
HUMAN NEEDS AND POLITICS**

Sessions will seek to introduce and explain realism and the research programme it generates for exploring human nature, the environment, political structures and human emancipation.

Papers are hereby invited on the philosophy of biology, feminism, psychoanalysis, Red/Green issues, race, international relations and injustice, or other relevant topics.

For further details, *or with offers of papers* (informal or formal), please contact

Andrew Collier  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Southampton  
SO9 5NH

Tel. 0703 5995000 ext. 3445

Jens Reich

## Germany—a Binary Poison 4

A brilliant invention. Two containers holding two chemical substances. Each in itself almost harmless. Only when the shell strikes do they react with one another and together turn into a deadly chemical weapon.

Just nearly harmless. Disposal is difficult, as with most organic compounds. Incinerate the contents of a gallon drum and the whole city will be wreathed in smoke. But discharge it into the sewage and iridescent greenish puddles will form, in the sludge the bacteria will suffocate again...

Twice Germany found herself at the epicentre of an explosion that devastated the globe. Now people want to keep her spirit divided—two thirds in one flask, one third in another. Better two, three... many Germanies: specially bred dwarf varieties are easier to cultivate.

*Setting: Budapest 1973*, at the formal reception for the international congress of computer science. A circle of onlookers has formed round the adversaries as if round two scrapping schoolboys. One protagonist is from Leipzig, the other from Stuttgart. They thrust their champagne-glasses into each other's chests and fire off arguments as if they were arrows. The man from Leipzig wants to prove that there are now two German nations, one bourgeois and the other socialist, which are to one another like fire and water, or at any rate oil and water. In this way he is carrying out his travelling instructions, which prescribe for political conversations on the conference fringes the illustration of recent party decisions, shortly to be incorporated into the GDR's constitution. The man from Stuttgart defends himself eloquently and without instructions. He cites the continuous unity of German culture and the German nation, mentioning Berlin, Weimar, Frankfurt and other symbols. With Vienna and Musil, with Kafka and Prague, he gets himself into a tangle: the names of the true German bearers of culture sound a bit outlandish...

Round about stand their colleagues (Hungarians, Bulgarians, Frenchmen and one Polish woman), amused and patting them both soothingly on the shoulder. Worthy fighting-cocks, these Germans: their English with its pan-German intonation can hardly be distinguished; but even at the sherry party they are loyal to their Hegel, deploying thesis and antithesis; they are cloned twins, cabaret clones for the

onlooking Europeans. Going by the outward appearance of their essence they are identical to one another, the essence of the appearance is non-identical, and they want to show us, persuade us, that their manifest identity-being turns into national non-identity and the latter into a kind of becoming.

*Scene change: 1989.* Chat show on West German TV. Four East and four West German men and women and a Swiss, who intervenes only once to make clear that the German question is 'fucking irrelevant' to him. The atmosphere of the company is embarrassed and the ever-dexterous host of the show has a hard time: in the house of the hanged man, someone has been clumsy enough to mention the rope.

The German Wall, in other words—'*Tbe' Wall*, '*Il' Murro*, '*La' Mur*, '*Ta' Siona*—that wonder of the world which is everywhere addressed only as a proper noun, if need be with a demonstrative pronoun, but never (unlike the Chinese Wall) with an adjective. The tactless person is Martin Walser, who sits there stubbornly and expresses his feeling that the absurd is absurd and no sophistry can pass it off to him as reason.<sup>1</sup> Unendurable, if Germany should henceforth crop up only as a generic term in the weather report!

The entire company is at one in attacking him. His West German friends with comradely severity reprimand his intellectual sally, which will guarantee him pride of place at any CSU reserved table. The colleagues from the GDR, today without express travel instructions (I think) but with their sure internal compass for negotiating obstacles, zigzag nimbly: they show sophisticated moderation, little sympathy, rather forbearance, at the Germano-maniac outbreak of the eloquent but misguided man of letters. Heiner Müller finds sly ambiguities which allow him to be classified neither as a beastly Saxon nor as an unprincipled cosmopolitan,<sup>2</sup> and the three others are at any rate immune to the national measles. That has to do with the Third Reich and also—as they admit—with their preference for being among the few who may travel to a chat show of this kind. Walser is a dear, stubborn lad. Sympathetically and modestly, he nods to them as they elegantly take their distance; then suddenly he lowers his square skull and rams once more into the palisade: *Non possum credere, quia absurdum*—and the chat-show guests are up and off again. Baying interjections from the studio audience (emigrés, of course) are fended off jointly—the hosts also taking the role of bouncers, as befits neighbours...

Thus does the German Question wheel over Europe's heads, like a pack of vultures that settle ponderously and eye their slowly maturing victim. If, scared to death, the victim manages to shoo them off, they hoist themselves ponderously into the air—only to land a bit further away and wait there...

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Walser, novelist whose works have explored the social-political relations in the developing German Federal Republic. Recent work has concentrated on the question of German identity.

<sup>2</sup> Heiner Müller, outstanding postwar East German playwright whose early socialist-realist work has given way to a form of postmodern 'self-criticism'.

Our neighbours have a bad conscience again. A kind of Versailles complex. Just a year ago, they still saw the division of the giant as just and inevitable—now they maintain an uneasy silence if the Poles (for example) begin to clamour loudly, because they see a danger arising of which they had never lost sight. Germany is stretching its limbs. The Federal Republic is shedding its geo-political hair-shirt like a dried skin. The GDR is bursting its ideological corset, supposedly all that can give its existence legitimacy. Reunification or confederation, annexation or single cultural nation?—it is all equally alarming. The neighbours are on the qui vive and look for ways to keep the two components of the poison in their separate vessels. The pressure on the valves grows.

To the thoughtful onlooker abroad, the GDR seems to appear like a scrap of paper that the vacuum cleaner will shortly pick up. Do all our paths really lead only to a unified greater Germany? Are we just a rehash of the little Saxon kingdom that was conquered by the mighty Western super-power in the time of Charlemagne? Its death agony lasted for thirty-two years. Will the crocodile swallow up the little alligator a second time, will the GDR be digested once again—1,200 years later—via the EEC?

Wait a bit, we shall see. Seventy-five years of German Reich can, at all events, not offset the historical burden of 750 years of division into regional states. It is quite wrong to transfer the machinery of the nineteenth century to our own time and to become a victim of the history lessons in which it was drilled into us that the regional mentality was a contemptible German vice. The particularist tradition is still strong: everyone is a Thuringian, a Saxon, a Mecklenburger, a Brandenburger—not just a German. If the sucking vacuum which the Federal Republic's overweening economic power and the dusty dominion of menace and routine in the GDR have combined to create could be filled, if this suction were not continuous, then it would not be so certain whether this country, this artificial construction, might not prove viable. Perhaps its inhabitants should be allowed to decide, and not just in brief telephone polls, in which a person easily says yes to reunification and a moment later is up in arms about the arrogance of the apostles of the West with their rustling banknotes.

Anyone who wishes to unite the GDR with the Federal Republic should not forget the question (supposedly Lenin's): Who to whom? We are still the more original Germans. Were Heine to come on a visit from the other world, I think he would recognize again the weather-beaten façades here. But over the other side? So many Italians, Greeks, Spaniards, Turks and people of colour? And all the old city centres drenched in colour and studded with cubes? His winter's tale at any rate fits the GDR better, its laughter and its weeping alike.

So we are the true Germans. If that lot wanted to unite with us, then if anything the little alligator would have to eat up the huge crocodile. Erich Honecker undoubtedly had this vision prophetically in mind ten years ago when (at Gera) he announced that, once the working class over there had imposed socialism...



*Toujours en parler, jamais y penser.* Always talking about it, but never seriously. The decades-old action programme of the reunifiers. Suddenly the so-called exodus threatens an emergency. Locks and walls open in the East and, were three million (let's say) to go over all at once, then the fateful card our lot so persistently and foolishly hung onto would be in the West's hand. Some more haggling would be necessary, but at least over immigration quotas and no longer over emigration permits. The Federal Republic realizes where its true patriotic interests lie, which cannot consist in bleeding the country white in the East and leading tens of thousands in triumph as Emperor Trajan led his prisoners on the Roman victory column.

I am German, of course. My heart is in my throat when I read Goethe's 'Welcome and Farewell' or Gottfried Benn's 'Michaelmas Daisies'. Like the traveller coming to Innsbruck in the popular ballad, I am filled with yearning for all countries in which the German language is spoken. And yet I have no need of the German national state. For the sake of our survival, the coming century will have to get by without war. No human agglomerations will be needed, in order supposedly to be protected through strength. *Small will be beautiful enough.*

The great void in us, national identity, is not to be covered over with thin planks. A sceptical generation has long achieved repression: people were world citizens, Europeans; the Federal Republic was an apartment-with-all-mod-cons, without sentimental ties. The GDR remained a cage from which many strove to escape. But the thorn is in us. Our latent, suppressed Germanness can at any time break out and produce a chauvinist sepsis. I always have to think of Goethe, the super-star, the Woodstock hero of the Werther generation, and how he found himself on the socio-political shoals when, after the French wars, he abstained from the burgeoning national euphoria.

We ought not to leave being German to others, the far Right perhaps. Otherwise it may turn out that we stand there, blasé, in our post-modern leisure wear, and watch while the young once again follow the black-white-and-red flag and experience the ancient, comfortable shudder as the old songs are sung and the incantation is whispered at the campfire, when the bedraggled fur rises on our backs, when 'it' runs down my spine.

We have need of all three ingredients: an awareness of our homeland, a stubborn attachment to the GDR and an authorized German identity. The only question is how to achieve the right mixture.

'Give me a BMW and the German Question can go to the devil... Take my Guardian away and I'll be able to stand it here... Let me out in the open at least once a year.' The people who talk like this must feel like tigers, padding to and fro in their cage, waiting for the gate to be left open.

There are also the others, who march *en masse* through the narrow streets of Leipzig and chant the ideals of the last century—but with such enthusiasm. 'We're staying here!' 'We are the people!' 'No

violence!' 'Thoughts are free!' And with shining eyes they sing the old songs, and their simple joy touches me.

*This is a late vintage of 1968*, now come to maturity in our country too. Will the common experience of liberation from servility, lethargy and resignation create the necessary self-awareness for the country not to implode spiritually, cracking under the pressure of its own ossified shell?

Germany—once more the question mark of Europe. The binary poison, whose two components can neither be united nor disposed of. So, for better or worse, we shall have to live (survive) together.

20 October 1989

### Postscript

I should not have written the article. In the four weeks since then, the sands have shifted beneath our feet and internal pressure has forced open the Wall. Traces of the poison's two components have come into contact and spread a hissing vapour. Rich in symbols as ever, the big TV stations camp out in all weathers in front of the Brandenburg Gate—its opening is to seal the change of paradigms, mark the high pass of the German Question's return to European politics.

✓ Not three millions have emigrated, just twenty thousand in the first week—in other words, the same loss of blood as last month. It will add up to millions, if the bleeding is not stopped.

In other ways too the framework has altered. Everyone can visit that shows now, if they are invited . . . if. People are allowed to be given BMWs. Travel not just once a year, though still without money. Only the Guardian will remain, even if at the moment he too has a fit of coughing.

We are celebrating as liberation what is actually going to be a return to the period before 1961, with constant emigration, cross-border commuting, a low-wage economy, an Ostmark devalued by the market, black-marketeering and smuggling (perhaps today with butter going across and computer discs coming back). The pensioner and the single mother will not be able to manage the shuttle—they will stay at home.

All the neighbours are setting off, in order to reach at least the outer circle of the new Europe—in other words, the status of Greece, Spain or Ireland. A harsh wind blows into the face of anyone who does not want to admit that forty years of the GDR, twenty-eight of them in the cage, were quite pointlessly wasted time: anyone still chasing the illusion of a fair socialism, as grandmother once chased the long-devalued banknote. Is all we have achieved with our lives really that the exchange rate has drifted from 1 : 4 to 1 : 20?

The joyful carnival after the Ninth of November will not pass off without a hangover. We shall have to learn that we need our own anchor, and not a consumption-mad devotion to the bigger, richer, stronger, smoother, diamantine Germany. It will remain our feared opponent, our dream partner, our glitter and our illusion. I shall admire it and hate it, despise it and love it. I am not withdrawing the article about the two components.

18 November 1989

## *comment*

Mary Evans

### A Comment on Nicky Hart

Nicky Hart's engaging essay on gender and stratification (NLR 175) is an eloquent contribution to debates about class. As she suggests, male academics, and particularly male academic sociologists, have a long tradition of assuming that women are peripheral to the process of class formation and the construction of class identity. The heroes of British sociology in the 1950s and 1960s were, at least to the Left, the manual male working class. The 'lads', as many a trade union leader described them, often assumed a responsibility for social change that was, to say the least, overdetermined. Indeed, throughout the 1950s it is possible to find in British literature, as much as the British academy, a mythologization of the working-class male and his part in both the class struggle and the personal encounters of sexual politics. Jimmy Porter and Arthur Seaton, in their different ways, resisted and denied the interests of women as forcefully as any academic.

If male academics did not have the same immediate coherence as Porter and Seaton then they had, perhaps, absorbed many of the same cultural values and standards about women. My initial disagreement with Nicky Hart is not, therefore, her contention that British theorists of class ignored women. Any reading of their work—from the male subject of their analysis to their theoretical conclusions—demonstrates a concentration on men that is impossible to deny. My argument is that this conceptual bias does not have the theoretical consequences that Nicky Hart suggests and that the failure concerns the limits and limitations of British culture. The real target of discussion should not be those individuals who have made an attempt (however flawed) to demonstrate the centrality of class to social analysis. Rather, it should be the culture itself, which for its own material convenience distinguishes between the public male world and the domestic female world and in doing so denies to both women and men the development of particular aspects of their being. We can legitimately criticize male sociologists for failing to address the sexism of British society, but at the same time we do have to acknowledge that the study of law had in itself a social radicalism. So: what I wish to argue here is that male (and/or masculinist) social scientists are not as incorrect in their discussion of class as is suggested and that the evidence for the 'feminization' of the culture (that is, the convergence of gender interests that Nicky Hart suggests) is insubstantial. On the contrary, there is evidence to support the alternative hypothesis: that in Britain in the

1980s women are increasingly expected to act as 'male' social beings, without any reciprocal adaptations on the part of men.

In her account of the work of Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Gorz *et al.* Nicky Hart criticizes their understanding of such concepts as 'work' (as only an activity outside the household and only a male preserve) and their implicitly critical use of the terms 'privatization' and 'home-centredness'. As she indicates, from the point of view of women there was a great deal to be said for increased male interest (not to mention participation) in the home. To support this view she cites the documentation (both historical and contemporary) of the domestic competition for resources. But whilst the evidence is substantial and the case for more equality in the allocation of domestic work overwhelming, we cannot from this construct neutral concepts of the 'home' and 'family life'. Both exist within capitalist society and contain at least one adult with a relationship to the process of production. In the sense that more married women with children are now in employment (albeit largely part-time) we can see that as an instance of the gender convergence which Nicky Hart emphasizes. But the apparent equality here remains that of the opportunity to compete in an unequal labour market—a market which remains organized around the assumption that workers work full-time and have no domestic commitments to limit their efficiency. Shelves of studies attest to the double shift of employed women, and their greater assumed responsibility for both the material and emotional well-being of the family.<sup>1</sup>

### The 'Ideal Home'

In the light of this evidence it is surely not too fanciful to consider whether the creation of the concept of the (private) 'ideal home'—a concept endlessly manipulable by fashion and created need—is not a further burden to women, in that it requires participation in consumption to be seen merely in terms of consumer choice. (In reality, income is often crucial to economic survival.) Equally, an ideology of privatization and home-centredness arguably increases class antagonism rather than diminishes it. The Thatcherite ideals of personal responsibility and individual housekeeping encourage *and* legitimate personal accumulation amongst those for whom it is possible; 'doing our best for the family' contains the ideological support for private schools, private health-care and social privilege just as much as it contains support for a united male/female family.

To assume, in the economic and political climate of the late 1980s, that "privatization" can be identified as a female-inspired strategy of social equality rooted in the contradictions of gender inequality' is surely to misinterpret a partial, and by no means entirely recent, social phenomenon. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have shown, the ideology of domestic privacy and the ideal of domestic bliss played a crucial part in the formation of bourgeois identity in the

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Artie Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*, New York 1989.

nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The 'privatization' of the working-class family could then be seen not as a consequence of women's fight for their interests but as part of the increasing ideological homogeneity of the culture and ideology of the British family. An important part of that transformation includes the transition from the ideal of a 'decent' home to that of a 'nice' home. The latter ideal, material rather than moral, allows the shifting relationships within the home to become less visible, and certainly less central. Indeed, in one crucial way the privatization of the family leaves with the family the major determinant of sexual inequality in the labour market—the taken-for-granted assumption that women, not men, are primarily responsible for the day-to-day care of children. Until that association is broken, it is surely not just optimistic but empirically incorrect to assume 'an equalization of the life chances of men and women'. At present, it is only by choosing to remain childless that some women are able to compete on equal terms with men in either the family or the labour market. The social conditions of biological reproduction remain, as many feminists have observed, the major source of gender inequality.

The qualification of 'some' in the previous paragraph leads me to a further dissatisfaction with Nicky Hart's essay. In her critique she assumes an ideology of masculinity that is independent of class, or ethnic, differences. I would argue that such an ideology exists in only the most partial sense; the work of Paul Willis *et al.* demonstrates the many-splendoured versions of masculinity within one culture, some of which are in competition with one another. So it is with femininity, and women. The use of the term 'women' here is as problematic as elsewhere; the discovery (for example, by Beatrix Campbell) that women from privileged circumstances have the same domestic responsibilities as other women demonstrates the uniformity of the ideology of women's domestic role; what it does not do is demonstrate or elucidate the varied conditions of personal negotiation with that ideology.<sup>3</sup>

Within the family there is reason to believe that the sexual division of labour continues. Patterns of consumption change, family size changes, divorce rates and patterns of family formation change, but what does not change is what Nicky Hart describes as women's 'domiciliary' role. But is it the case, as she suggests, that women are now becoming more politically conscious of this role, and their role as paid workers, and therefore turning (in the much vaunted term of the United States) to 'gender gap' politics in which women are more likely to vote for parties of the Left than the Right? The evidence about Britain is limited, but it is clear that the Conservatives (particularly their present leader) are still able to manipulate effectively the importance of personal and individual solutions to general problems. The collectivist solutions of the Labour Party remain, for many women, alien—as alien as Engels's assumption that after the proletarian revolution the State would take over responsibility for children and the household.

<sup>2</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, London 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour*, London 1983, and Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies*, London 1987.

But Engels, academic sociologists and the Labour Party do not form a single political or intellectual tradition. However inadequate his views on sexual politics, Engels did envisage and hope for the transformation of class relations, whilst many authors of studies of voting behaviour or working-class behaviour apparently did (and do) not. As such they were not employing the same concept of class as that of Marx and Engels. Marx, in particular, was deeply critical of social scientists who could only consider the agenda of social problems set by bourgeois society. It is not inappropriate to mention voting studies here: many were written by men who wanted the Labour Party to win elections. From *Must Labour Lose?* to the infinitely more sophisticated Nuffield voting studies, the emphasis is on established parliamentary politics and much less on the dynamics of class in a Marxist sense. Even if Engels's analysis in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* is nowadays regarded with scepticism by feminists, there can be no doubt that he and Marx saw the relationship between class and gender relations. Indeed, he is at his best, and wittiest, when he takes us inside the nineteenth-century home and outlines the boredom and the hypocrisy of the socially sanctioned bourgeois family.

Academic social scientists are another matter, as is their relationship to the social structure. In conclusion, therefore, I would like to suggest that much academic writing on class, and gender, is saturated at least as much by class, as by masculinist interests, and specifically by the hidden agenda of private property. For most academics, like many people, the family is the primary location of private property. Women share in that property and are concerned with its maintenance. To vote Conservative is at times rational if such behaviour promises to maintain property, at other times it is rational to vote Labour if it offers collective solutions that limit personal expenditure. Women as much as men have always had material interests. Nicky Hart has rightly emphasized this; my qualification is that those interests are often much closer to those of men than she suggests.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Communication:* We have been asked by Omar Sheikhmous to correct the reference in Mohammed Malek's article 'Kurdistan and the Iran-Iraq War' (NLR 175) to a meeting 'in Paris between the Iraqi Ambassador, Mohammed Sadiq-al-Mashad, and the PUK executive committee members Fuad Kamal and Omar Sheikh Moussa' (p. 88). Contradicting certain press reports of the time, Mr Sheikhmous writes: 'For the sake of the historical record and scientific objectivity, I would like to point out that such a meeting has never taken place. No negotiations or talks were conducted outside the country, either by myself or by Dr Kamal Fuad. Not with Ambassador al-Mashad nor with any other Iraqi representative. All negotiations were conducted inside the country. Both Dr Fuad and I were members of the leadership committee and among the founders of the PUK in 1975, and I was a member of the PUK Political Bureau from 1980 and its main representative abroad after the autumn of 1981. If any such contacts had taken place, I would have been informed about them.'

THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

80 *new left review*

## THE SHADOWED VICTORY

David Halliday	<b>Triumph of the West</b>
Henry Kaldor	<b>After the Cold War</b>
Henry Anderson	<b>A Culture in Contraflow</b>
John Jenson	<b>Representations of Difference</b>
Edward Said	<b>Narrative and Geography</b>
Anthony Barnett	<b>Perennial Cambodia</b>

**Buhle on 'America'; Hilton on Tax Revolts**

£3.50

\$6.50

ISSN 0028-6060

180/1990

1		<i>Themes</i>
5	<i>Fred Halliday</i>	The Ends of Cold War
25	<i>Mary Kaldor</i>	After the Cold War
41	<i>Perry Anderson</i>	A Culture in Contraflow—I
81	<i>Edward W. Said</i>	Narrative, Geography and Interpretation
101	<i>Anthony Barnett</i>	'Cambodia Will Never Disappear'
127	<i>Jane Jenson</i>	Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism
		REVIEW
163	<i>Paul Buble</i>	America: Post-Modernity?
177	<i>Rodney Hilton</i>	Unjust Taxation and Popular Resistance
		COMMENT
187	<i>Elizabeth Wilson</i>	The Postmodern Chameleon

<i>Editor</i>	Robin Blackburn	
<i>Editorial Committee</i>	Patrick Camiller, Alexander Cockburn, Mike Davis, Peter Dews, Diane Elson, Norman Geras, Quintin Hoare, Oliver MacDonald, Branka Magill, Ellen Meiksins Wood	
<i>Associate Editors</i>	Perry Anderson, Tariq Ali	
<i>Editorial correspondence</i>	New Left Review, 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR	
<i>Subscription correspondence</i>	New Left Review, 120-126 Lavender Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HP	
<i>Business Manager</i>	Robin Gable	
<i>Advertising Manager</i>	Arthur Boyars	
<i>American Distributor</i>	B de Boer, 113 East Center Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA	
<i>NLR Prices</i>	<i>Individual subscription:</i>	<i>Institutional subscription:</i>
<i>Inland (UK/Eire)</i>	£17	£33
<i>Europe (air) &amp; Rest of World (ASP):</i>	£21 or US\$33	£37 or US\$58
<i>USA &amp; Canada (Airmail):</i>	£21 or US\$33 or Can\$40	£37 or US\$58
<i>Airmail overseas:</i>	£29 or US\$45 or Can\$55	£45 or US\$70

MICROFICHE SETS 1-178 (1960-1989), incl. cited index £350 (inland), £365/US\$600 (overseas)

INDEX 1-178 (1960-1989): *Inland*: £28 (cloth), £13 (paper) *Overseas*: £31/US\$50 (cloth), £15/US\$24 (paper)

New Left Review (ISSN 0028-6060) is published bi-monthly by New Left Review Ltd, 6 Meard St., London W1V 3HR, UK. Annual subscription price in the USA and Canada is US\$33 for individuals, US\$58 for institutions, including airspeed delivery. Second-class postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. USA POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to New Left Review, Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Printed in Great Britain



Given the epoch-making upheavals of the last year—and the importance of the peace movements to this journal from the time of its foundation in 1960—it is particularly appropriate that we open this thirtieth anniversary issue with articles by Fred Halliday and Mary Kaldor on the ending of the Cold War. In our last issue, R.W. Davies and Giovanni Arrighi considered the implications of recent events in the light of over a century and a half of socialist aspiration. In this issue attention is drawn to the vitality and menace of capitalism. Fred Halliday, historian of the making of the 'second Cold War', here charts its unmaking. While welcoming the popular eruptions in Eastern Europe, he warns that the collapse of Communism is giving new scope to a re-charged and rapacious capitalism and is also unleashing highly reactionary and anti-democratic social forces and ideologies. Mary Kaldor, one of the leading activists of END over the last decade, points to the role of the peace movements in opening the space for detente and encouraging the politics of popular self-determination; she argues that the political liberation of Eastern Europe must now be followed by a watchful solidarity with the potential victims of the sweeping monetarist and laissez-faire experiment underway in the post-communist societies. As Paul Buhle observes in the course of his review of Jean Baudrillard's 'America', social misery and tension shadow even the world's leading capitalist state, though this is not registered by those for whom the image is the only reality.

Critical engagement with the ideas of Raymond Williams has marked each of the three decades of the existence of the Review. In the memorial lecture which we publish here Edward Said contrasts the approach to third world cultures and to imperialism to be found in the writing of Williams with that to be found in the work of Albert Camus, haunted as the latter was by a species of colonialist bad faith. Also in this issue is a study by Anthony Barnett of an intriguing episode in the colonial and anti-colonial formation of a Cambodian identity—the 'discovery' of Angkor Wat. Said and Barnett in different ways point up the dangers of cultural Eurocentrism, which may now emerge in new forms.

Articles on the progress of the women's movements have been a regular feature in NLR in recent years, both because of the importance of feminism to the re-definition of socialism and because the real conditions of life of women in any society constitute vital evidence as to its operating principles and level of civilization. In the latest addition to our international survey Jane Jenson argues that French feminist theorists, despite their considerable sophistication, have not always hit upon the best strategies for identifying the continuing oppression of women in their own society; the discourse of difference in some cases proved to be open to appropriation by those concerned to halt or reverse moves towards substantive equality for women.

As a theoretical journal of the Left the NLR has felt the need to attend to an agenda of debate and research in philosophy, history, economics and social theory that has been changing in recent years almost as swiftly and unexpectedly as the world political scene. When this journal was founded there were few vital connections between Anglo-American and Continental European philosophers or social theorists. In NLR 178 Sabina Lovibond traced common themes in the work of a variety of British, American and European philosophers. In a study the first part of which we publish in this issue Perry Anderson looks at some of the shifts in British intellectual life since the publication of his essay 'Components of the National Culture' in NLR 50.

The disarray of the Thatcher administration, analysed by Bob Jessop and others in NLR 179, has been brought to a head by popular opposition to the 'poll tax'. Rodney Hilton points out that taxation is a form of surplus extraction which has been unduly neglected by historians and gives an account of medieval tax revolts which has a surprisingly contemporary ring.

\* \* \*

One of the most distinctive aspects of the stance of the New Left in 1960 was a simultaneous rejection of Communism and Social Democracy. In different ways these two dominant Left traditions were held to have been corrupted by statism and Cold War militarism, and to deny the values of socialist humanism and participatory democracy. Something of this original stance of opposition to Stalinism and Labourism has continued to define the NLR's politics ever since. While there were to be

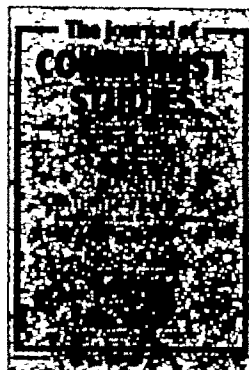
many differences of emphasis and agenda in the successive periods of its development, the stress was invariably upon discovering alternatives to what were seen as the exhausted and compromised politics of traditional Left parties and governments. It would be wrong, of course, simply to equate Stalinism and Social Democracy. The major crimes of Stalinism—horrendous repression at home and abroad—have no Social Democratic parallel. Of its nature Social Democracy has been a weaker and more accommodating formation, whose main derelictions since at least 1914 have been acquiescence in the inhuman effects of capitalism and imperialism—notably the untold number of victims of this century's wars, crises and famines—for most of which capitalism bears the main responsibility.

As Fred Halliday argues in this issue, the central challenge to the Left today lies in the continued vigour of capitalism at a time when its external antagonist has collapsed. While this remarkable mode of production displays a protean ability to assume new forms, to absorb new forces and to colonize new areas of life, it still retains a formidably divisive and destructive potential. It continues to accumulate wealth at one pole and poverty at another. It encourages reckless exploitation of human populations and of natural resources. The unstable and restless process of capitalist accumulation possesses a tremendous and unlimited momentum, fostering new antagonisms and threatening the habitability of the globe. But it also provokes the most varied kinds of resistance, from the new proletarian suburbs of the Third World to the decaying inner cities of the First, from hi-tech industrial parks to crumbling rust-belt, from airline workers and ambulance workers to oppressed minorities and frustrated professionals, from movements to extend democracy to those concerned with protection of the environment, to mention only a few of the potential or actual forces of contestation. Sometimes the New Left made the populist assumption that the opponents of capitalism were united in a natural and predestined alliance, dispensing with any need for analysis, programme and tactics. This is an emphasis NLR did not share. We continue to believe that today, more than ever, it is urgent to identify new, more adequate and effective forms of anti-capitalist 'general interest' which will be something more than the sum of particular anti-capitalist movements.

# FRANK CASS

## ✓ **Journal of Communist Studies**

Communism is passing through a period of crisis and transformation. *The Journal of Communist Studies* devotes particular attention to this process of transformation and reform and aims to provide a perspective within which current events can be understood.



**Volume 6 1990**

**Quarterly: March, June, September, December**  
**ISSN 0268-4535**

**Individuals: £28 (\$50)**  
**Institutions: £65 (\$95)**

For a **FREE** sample copy please write to the address below.

---

At least once a year *The Journal of Communist Studies* presents a special issue devoted to a particular theme of topical interest in the politics of communism. They are also available in hardback.

### **CUBA AFTER 30 YEARS**

**Rectification and the Revolution**

*Edited by Richard Gillespie*

0 7146 3390 £18.00/\$27.50  
1990

### **MARKET ECONOMY AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN HUNGARY**

*Edited by Chris Hann*

0 7146 3396 8 £22.50/\$30.00  
1990

### **GORBACHEV AND GORBACHEVISM**

*Edited by Walter Joyce, Hillel Ticktin and Stephen White*

0 7146 3360 7 £22.50/\$27.50  
1989

### **COMMUNISM AND REFORM IN EAST ASIA**

*Edited by David Goodman*

0 7146 3349 £24.00/\$28.00  
1988

**Gainsborough House, 11 Gainsborough Road, London E11 1RS**

**Tel: 081 530 4226 Fax: 081 530 7795**

Fred Halliday

## *The Ends of Cold War*

The events of the latter half of 1989 represent an earthquake in world politics.\* They have restated, in a dramatic form, the most neglected facet of political life, one spurned in east as much as in west, namely the capacity of the mass of the population to take sudden, rapid and novel political action after long periods of what appears to be indifference. In their speed and import and the uncertainties they unleash, they can only be compared to a war, in which all established expectations and plans are swept aside, in the face of novel, and irrefutable, realities. Neither Left nor Right can claim credit for this turn of events, even as both seek to claim vindication from it. The Right began 1989, the year of revolutionary anniversaries, proclaiming that revolutions were a thing of the past. The Left has been confounded by the popular rejection of socialism, and the espousal of nationalism, predominant throughout the eastern bloc states. This is a time not only for major changes in the world situation, but for a re-examination of (often implicit) fundamentals by the socialist movement.

It is in this, comprehensively uncertain and confusing, context that, from both sides of the former divide, voices can be heard saying that the cold war is over and that we are entering an epoch of greater security and, to use a modish term, interdependence. More attention has been focused on Europe where the initially separate processes of integration in the West, leading up to 1992, and disintegration of the Soviet bloc in the East, have now joined, linked by geography, in the search for a new 'security' architecture and the bridging issue of German unity. Whatever cold war means, events of the past few months have underlined the fact that, throughout the four frozen decades that have passed, the core issue, the central terrain of rivalry, has been Europe, and the socio-political system prevailing there.

Yet, for all its current European emphasis, this process concerns more than Europe: even in its simplest form, this assertion of an end to cold war results from more than the collapse of the eastern European political system and the expectations generated by *perestroika*. The European 1989 was preceded by another transitional year of perhaps equal importance, the third world 1988, the year in which, in some dozen conflicts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, processes of negotiation, encouraged by the great powers, began to take effect: in Cambodia, Afghanistan, the Gulf, the Horn of Africa, Angola, the Sahara, Nicaragua and elsewhere. The importance of the third world in this process and in the prospects for East-West relations in the 1990s needs no defence: while Europe has been largely at peace since 1945, over 140 conflicts of an anti-colonial, inter-state, class and ethnic character have raged in the third world. Trieste and Berlin apart, the major East-West crises have been in the third world: beginning with Azerbaijan in 1946, through China, Korea, Indo-China, Suez, the Congo, Cuba, down to the 'regional conflicts' of the 1980s. The casualty figures speak for themselves. Over twenty million people are believed to have died in these conflicts. In Europe the only comparably sanguinary encounter was the Greek civil war, in which some eighty thousand lost their lives.

### Meanings of Cold War

Before examining these changes and their place in modern history, and before approaching the claim that the cold war is over, it may be clarifying to pose two anterior questions, namely what the term cold war means and what its underlying dynamics may have been. Despite its apparently modern, academic and journalistic provenance, the term actually has a curious prehistory: coined by Don Juan Manuel, a fourteenth-century Spanish writer, to denote the unending rivalry of Christians and Arabs in Spain, it was reinvented by the American financier and diplomat Bernard Baruch, who claimed to have heard it from a vagrant sitting on a bench in Central Park sometime in 1946. This casual origin has not helped precision and has meant that the term 'cold war' can be used in at least two ways. One is to refer to

---

<sup>1</sup> Text of a lecture given to Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, 5 March 1990, as part of the Department's programme of events marking the 25th anniversary of its establishment.

particular periods of intense confrontation between the two major postwar blocs, and in particular to the years of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the First Cold War, and those from the very late 1970s through to late 1988, the Second Cold War. The other usage of cold war is to denote the underlying rivalry of 'communism' and capitalism itself, which began in 1917 and which, as a result of World War II, became the dominant, constitutive divide in world affairs.

This second usage of the term 'cold war' touches upon much broader questions of interpretation and analysis in international relations. In general terms it can be said that in the literature on cold war and East-West conflict there are four broad explanations of why the two blocs have conflicted as they have. For one school, associated with conventional 'realist' and strategic thinking, East-West rivalry is but another version of traditional great power conflict, to be explained by balance of power and other considerations. Ideology is seen as only an expression of this strategic interaction, and differences in internal composition of these societies as an analytic irrelevance. A second school, common amongst liberal writers, locates the conflict at the level of policy mistakes, missed opportunities and misperceptions on both sides: in this view, the conflict was avoidable—better communication in the period after 1945 or in the late 1970s could have avoided both Cold War I and Cold War II. A third school argues that what appear to be international rivalries are the product of factors within these societies, i.e. of political and economic factors that push the states in question to compete with each other. Many analyses of Cold War II, in particular, stressed the extent to which political factors within the USA and USSR, and the uncontrolled dynamic of the arms race itself, caused this more recent confrontation to mature. The appearance of inter-bloc or inter-systemic conflict masked a homology, with both sides using and benefiting from the contest within their own domains of domination. This, in variant forms, is an argument common amongst left-wing writers critical of both the USA and USSR, such as E.P. Thompson, Mary Kaldor, Michael Cox, Noam Chomsky and André Gunder Frank. For them cold war itself is a 'system', rather than a competition between two systems.

No one can deny that each of the first three of these explanations can cast light on the course of East-West relations: there were elements of traditional great power rivalry, misperception, and domestic determination. The argument of inter-systemic rivalry has been weakened in its own right because it has been espoused as ideology, in anti-communist 'freedom' versus 'totalitarianism' form on the right, and in dogmatic 'two camps' form within the Soviet bloc. One of the powerful incentives for critics of cold war to deny its inter-systemic character has been the desire to break with these competing, but homologous, simplifications. But the argument being suggested here is that on their own the three explanations mentioned are not sufficient to explain the character, duration and depth of the cold war. What gave it its particular strength, beyond these conventional features of international conflict, was its inter-systemic character, the fact that it expressed the rivalry of two different social, economic and political systems. Each hoped to prevail on a world scale, to produce a

homogenous order within states, and each denied the legitimacy of the other, even as they were compelled to enter into diplomatic and other relations, not least because of the threat of nuclear weapons.

It need not escape mention that if, in the early 1980s, this argument had to be presented at an abstract or at least immanent level, events of the last few years have vindicated it in practice. What follows is a claim that 1989 has been the test of theories of cold war: the jury is no longer out. The 'end' of cold war, in the broader sense, was systemic homogeneity, and the target the socio-economic and political character of the core states of each bloc.

### A Triple Historical Context

The claim that the cold war is over is, therefore, an ambiguous one, depending on the sense in which the term is used. To answer whether and in what sense the cold war is over requires some examination of the three historical contexts within which the changes of 1988–1989 may be said to lie. The first, most evident for third world conflicts and the arms race, is that the detente of the late 1980s marks an end to what has been termed the Second Cold War, that is, the period of intense US–Soviet rivalry and acrimony that began around 1979 and lasted through Gorbachev's advent to power in 1985 until the Iceland summit of 1986. The term 'cold war' was used in this context, by analogy with the first cold war of the late 1940s and early 1950s, to denote a period not of hot war, nor of normal peacetime, but of confrontation and alarm, short of all-out military engagement. There are many issues in dispute about Cold War II: but it was arguably comparable to the First Cold War and, like it, involved non-violent confrontation in Europe and multiple and violent conflicts in the third world.

The second significance of the late 1980s is that it marks an end to the post-war system prevailing in Europe. This applies most obviously to the division of Europe and, by extension, to Germany. The Warsaw Pact and even NATO will have greatly reduced functions, if they survive at all. With reasonable confidence it can be asserted that in the course of the 1990s the current upheavals will produce a new order west of the Soviet frontier. Germany will be reunited, possibly within a matter of months, and functioning multiparty systems and capitalist economies will develop throughout Eastern Europe. Whatever internal uncertainties these countries may face, the international pressures on them—of example, diplomacy, finance—will push them in this direction and steer their transition. The change will be more complicated than it was in the western European anomalies of the 1970s, Spain and Portugal: alterations of political system are obviously easier than of socio-economic and ideological structure. But there is little doubt that such a transition can and will occur.

This change in Eastern Europe is accompanied by, and itself compounds, another alteration in the postwar system, namely the end of the bipolar system and in particular of the system dominated by what appeared to be two so-called superpowers. The result of 1989,



epitomised in the Malta summit, held amidst the wreckage of the communist regimes in eastern Europe, is that there is now only one 'superpower', the USA. The USSR has lost its leverage in Europe, with the collapse of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, is weakened and preoccupied by economic and social crisis, and is not able to compete with the USA or the West more generally in the military and economic spheres. The USSR is now little more than a major continental power, without a supportive alliance system. The illusion of 'rough parity', as Brezhnev liked to call it, is no longer sustainable.

This post-war system is often called that of Yalta, on the assumption that the February 1945 summit in the Crimea actually established it. It is on this basis that those who reject the system have blamed the western powers for 'agreeing to' Soviet demands. In reality, however, the pattern of peacetime Europe had already been fixed two years earlier, and somewhat to the north-east, in the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk, when the Red Army finally broke Hitler's forces. There was no 'arguing with' Stalingrad: Yalta merely recognized the balance of forces then existing in Europe. Roosevelt and Churchill could no more have altered this than the current British government can guarantee the post-1997 system of government in Hong Kong. Critics of Yalta also tend to overlook the significance of Soviet military power in another respect: the defeat of Hitler not only guaranteed Soviet control of eastern Europe, but also enabled the re-establishment of democratic government in Western Europe. At a time when all in the Soviet past is being sneered at, not least within the USSR itself, it needs recalling just what the strategic arithmetic of 1944-45 reflected—the 80 German divisions on the eastern front, with only 20 on the western to say nothing of the comparative casualty figures of the Soviet and Western armies. It is on this historic basis that both parts of modern Europe were built. Without Stalingrad a Nazi regime might still be in power, not only in Berlin and Warsaw, but in Paris and Amsterdam as well. All the good things that may now follow—1992, the common European home, the benign oneiric world of the Eurovision song contest—are being constructed on foundations laid by the Red Army.

### The Versailles Mould

It is not, however, only the systems and conflicts of the post-1945 period that now appear to be in question. For the upheavals of the past year have placed in question not only Yalta and Potsdam, but also much of what was agreed at an earlier postwar conference, that of Versailles. As much as anything, the explosion in Europe takes us back to the period of World War I, and in some ways before. There were at least three aspects of Versailles, each of which is now in question. The first, often overlooked today, was the reallocation of colonial territories: two at least of those, Namibia and Palestine, have remained arenas of conflict to the present day. Namibia now seems to have reached a resolution, to become the 170th sovereign state in the contemporary world. The fate of Palestine remains undecided, despite changes in both Israeli and Palestinian opinion. The second significance of Versailles was the establishment of a post-imperial order in

Europe itself: four empires lost their European domains—the Ottoman, the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian and, in a separate but nonetheless conjoined process often forgotten in these islands, the British. The result was the independence of several new European nations, among them the three Baltic states, Finland, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Albania, Ireland. Germany was subjugated and in part demilitarized. In the mid-1980s it might have appeared that much of that system remained: Germany, which had temporarily broken its bonds in the 1930s, was still subjugated, and those national states that had survived World War II, i.e. all but the Baltic three, were secure.

The upheavals of the late 1980s have altered that: as in other matters, Ireland took the lead, being the first to challenge the post-1918 frontiers with the re-emergence of the Ulster issue in the late 1960s. What Ulster represents in comparative perspective is the failure of a post-World War I settlement to stick and the revival, on the basis of new economic difficulties and fresh political perspectives, of enmities that exploded in that period. Today others have caught up with Ulster in defiance of the verdicts of 1918–1920 and with what promise to be even more violent consequences: in Kosovo, Bulgaria, the Caucasus—the latter, for all its remoteness, still part of geographic Europe. Who knows how long it will be before the Fermanaghs and Tyrones of eastern and central Europe are once again in the news: Macedonia, northern Epirus, Silesia, eastern Ukraine. From the Falls Road to Rosenheim and beyond, the solemn undertakings of Helsinki, to respect the frontiers of post-1918 and post-1945 Europe, have dwindling purchase.

Versailles was not, however, only concerned with reallocating colonies and redividing the map of Europe. As Arno Mayer has shown so well in his *Politics and Diplomacy of Peace-Making*, Versailles was equally concerned with another legacy of World War I, the Bolshevik revolution. Much of anti-communist western strategy towards the USSR—from the first intervention through the Riga doctrines to postwar containment—was adumbrated at that initial gathering of the imperialist powers. For the collision of two world systems, later to be embodied in the bipolar conflict of the 1940s and beyond, itself had its origins in 1919. Amidst the ruins of the war to end all wars, 1919 saw the constitution of two rival international political systems, each based on a mixture of idealism and calculation: the League of Nations and the Communist International. By constituting a political and social system fundamentally different from and militantly opposed to the capitalist West, Lenin laid down the parameters of the later division of the world and its inherent competitions. That it did not emerge as the dominant feature of the world until 1945 was due to the relative weakness of the USSR up to the Second World War. The inter-war period was still one dominated by inter-capitalist conflict. But the underlying rivalry of the capitalist and socialist systems was already in place and has continued until the 1980s. Stalin dissolved the Comintern in 1943 to mollify Western leaders: but he did so only when he had in hand an instrument far more effective in spreading Soviet influence abroad, in the shape of the Red Army.

The changes of the last five years appear, however, to have brought this underlying asymmetry of capitalism and 'communism' to an end. For the retreat of the USSR as a world power has gone together with an increased questioning of its internal system and ideology. The future of the USSR is far less certain than that of eastern Europe: but a major and probably irreparable breach has been made in the economic and political system prevailing in the USSR since the 1920s. In international policy, Gorbachev has forsaken the commitment to competition with and opposition to the capitalist West, abandoning class struggle in the name of universal human values. Soviet officials now openly deny any conflict between the two systems or the validity of any traditional concept of imperialism. There is, as Fidel Castro, so openly regrets, no longer a socialist camp. The semblance of an international communist movement, which survived the Sino-Soviet dispute of 1960, no longer holds. Soviet policy in the third world, without wholly discarding previous commitments, has become more and more conciliatory to the West. Soviet officials now tell third world allies that the term 'solidarity' has been replaced by that of 'mutual interests'. But the internal changes are even more important, not only because they betoken an inexorable Soviet approximation to Western practices and values, and on Western terms, but also because they lock Soviet society and the Soviet economy more completely into that of the West. In sum, the new course being charted by Gorbachev, however uncertain its future, represents a break with the historical legacy of the Bolshevik revolution at home and abroad. It amounts to nothing less than the reorganization of the USSR on capitalist lines, socio-economic as well as political: within the space of a generation little may be left of the impact of 1917, beyond a general popular nostalgia for egalitarian distribution and a residual international role. The CPSU, even if it remains the ruling party, may resemble more the Mexican PRI than its previous form.

### Class Struggle on an International Scale

It is now possible to return to the question with which we began, namely of whether the cold war has ended. It is evident that this depends on which sense of cold war is being used. In the first sense, it would appear plausible to suggest that the cold war is over. Since the mid-1980s, relations between the USSR and the West have improved to such a point, and across such a wide range of issues, that it is difficult to see how a return to the climate of 1950 or 1983 is possible. There could be a dramatic change of policy in either capital—if Gorbachev is ousted by a nationalist-Brezhnevite coup, or if an unreconstructed Dankworth Quayle were, by some misadventure individual or electoral, to come to occupy the Oval office. There could also be some major crisis, all the more dangerous for being unanticipated, over a regional issue: a repeat of Suez in 1956, or Cuba in 1962. But the degree of diplomatic and other interaction, and trust, between the two sides is such that even were such a crisis to erupt, perhaps in the Balkans or in Iran, the chances of its being contained would be high, and of its permanently undermining the current detente, and ushering in Cold War III, remote.

When we turn to the second meaning of cold war, the situation is rather different. Here there appears to be a widespread temptation to recognize that the cold war is ending, but to see this as a symmetrical, convergent process. Both blocs have faced difficulties in the Second Cold War and have been unable to prevail as they had hoped: the USA, seeking to outspend the USSR in the arms race, has run up the largest budget deficit in history, become the greatest debtor nation in the world, and continued to lose competitiveness to the Japanese and Germans. Equally there are those in the West and in the USSR who suggest that since the differences between capitalism and communism have diminished, the internal changes within the Soviet bloc accompanying detente are an evolutionary process. Capitalism has changed and will continue to do so. But it is specious to present the outcome as one in which both systems were equally debilitated or in which current changes are symmetrical. For the end of the cold war, in sense one, and the prevailing climate of detente in Europe and most of the third world, are being achieved not on the basis of a convergence of the two systems, or of a negotiated truce between them, but on the basis of the collapse of one in the face of the other. This means nothing less than the defeat of the communist project as it has been known in the twentieth century and the triumph of the capitalist. This is so evidently the case that it provides retrospective validation of the inter-systemic interpretation of cold war. The linkage of international change and relaxation of tension with the internal collapse of 'communism' and the spread of capitalist relations into the former bloc states illustrates just how the course of inter-state rivalry correlated with internal, systemic difference. The course of recent events should, moreover, underline to those who ever doubted it, the degree to which there did exist in the 'communist' states a system based on different social and economic criteria. If all had been capitalist, or subject to the workings of the international capitalist market, there would have been no need for East-West conflict and no need now for radical reorganization of post-communist societies.

This process is by no means complete. We do not yet know what the post-electoral map of eastern Europe will look like, but few can believe that the existing communist parties will remain in power, or even survive as major political forces: electoral marginalization, at 5 to 10 per cent, would seem their most likely fate. The situation in the USSR is still evolving, but what is striking is not only the USSR's inability to maintain its international alliance system, the erstwhile socialist camp, but also its lack of any plausible future for Soviet socialism itself. Whether the dénouement takes five years or fifty, whether it happens on an 'all-union' basis, within the existing USSR, or through the breakaway of constituent republics, whether it is peaceful or bloody, these we cannot know, although it would not be imprudent to fear the worst. The reality is that the Soviet system has lost its self-confidence, any sense of where it is going, of its own historical and ethical worth, and of its international role. The USSR is engaged in a healthy, long-overdue and public examination of its past and of the problems of Soviet society today. But this is not all. Abject denial of what it did achieve, even in World War II, a naive overstatement of the virtues of Western capitalism, capitulation to all sorts of

regressive ideologies of a nationalist, familialist and religious character, and an abandonment of the internationalist commitments that were one of the brighter sides of the Brezhnevite era, also characterize Soviet policy today. Gorbachev himself is, with great skill and commitment, steering the ship towards a port the character and very location of which he cannot enunciate. He is doing the best he can to give the Bolshevik revolution a soft landing: the alternatives—the stony regressions of Ligachev, the vapidities of the demagogue Yeltsin—provide even less of an answer.

In the third world many states that in the 1970s were seen as socialist or at least 'of socialist orientation' are today imitating the USSR in economy and politics: Gorbachev has given them a contradictory injunction—to follow their own paths to socialism, and, at the same time, to 'learn from the international significance of *perestroika*'. Today 'states of socialist disorientation' might better describe their condition. At recent count, only five states in the world still adhered in political life to an orthodox model: Cuba, Albania, Vietnam, North Korea, China. All five of these are, of course, distinguished by the fact that they were the sites of indigenous revolutionary movements, with social bases and nationalist character, owing little to the Red Army. The four smaller ones are, however, increasingly on the defensive, unable to take the initiative in the face of increasing pressure from without. Cuba, Albania and North Korea are in political paralysis, of an ominous kind; Vietnam is adjusting and, with a solution in Cambodia, may be able to right itself. It is the last of the five, China, that poses the greatest problems, not least in the wake of Tiananmen Square. It is facile to blame that massacre only on old men, who will soon pass away: the organization, shooting and post-massacre repression have been perpetrated by younger cadres who have a stake in maintaining the system. But China will find it hard to resist international pressure in the long run, especially as its model must now look increasingly discomfited by developments in the USSR. As for those third world parties espousing orthodox communism and still not in power, they may be fared either to fail or to adjust: the Filipino New People's Army, Sendero Luminoso, and the Tigre Liberation Front, the latter two vaunting the imagined virtues of an earlier Mao and an idealized Enver Hoxha, would seem doomed to the first fate, the South African Communist Party would seem to have chosen the second. In the world's largest bourgeois democracy, the CPI(M), initially champion of an independent revolutionary line, has, in saluting the massacre of Peking, encouraged its demise.

The failure of the communist model to constitute a viable, internationally distinct bloc, and the historical reversal of the process that began in 1917, do not appear to be in doubt. The cold war, in its broader historic sense, is continuing, but with the collapse of one of the two protagonists. In this sense, the apparent generosity of Western claims that the antagonism between the two is over conceals a triumphalist undertow. To speak in the language of 'old thinking', what we are now witnessing is class struggle on an international scale, as the superior strength of Western capitalism forces open the societies partially closed to it for four or more decades. One has only

to watch the swift, decisive and methodical strangulation of the GDR by the python of West German capitalism to see how this process is working, or the asset-stripping acquisitions of Hungarian and Polish factories by Western business.

### Complexities of 'Stagnation'

Recognition of this fact does not, however, take us very far towards answering another question: what was it that led to this turn in the underlying cold war and in particular why it happened when it did. The conventional answer is to say that the communist system had 'failed': that its economy had lost any dynamic, that it lost political appeal because it was undemocratic, and that it could not match the West in the range of areas that constitute international competition. There is some truth in this, but it important to set this failure in some context. First, there is, in historical perspective, little correlation between the political appeal of communism and its democratic character. The period of greatest repression in the USSR was not in the 1980s but in the 1930s: it was then that Stalin killed millions of people, directly and through neglect. Yet the industrial and military success of the Soviet system was also achieved in that time, through the mobilization and support of the Soviet population, and it was then too that Soviet communism enjoyed its greatest following in the West. This was also true of the third world: witness the revolutions of China and Vietnam in the 1940s. As late as the 1970s, when 'stagnation' had set in at home, the Soviet model commanded widespread support in newly independent African revolutionary states. The historical irony is that communism has lost its appeal just at the moment when it has demonstrated a new political potential, an ability to change that theorists of totalitarianism and many within the Soviet system had doubted.

At the economic level, a similar problem arises. It is conventional now to state that the Soviet-style economies are a failure, and Soviet writers themselves encapsulate this in the terms 'stagnation', *zastoi*, and 'slowing down', *zamedeniie*, applied to the Brezhnev period to cover an allegedly interlocked range of issues—falling growth rates, technological inferiority, industrial paralysis, social decay, ecological disaster. Yet this picture is an overstated one. The fact is that in the postwar period as a whole growth rates in the USSR, and the provision of a range of social services including housing, health and education, have improved substantially. Overall Soviet living standards doubled between the end of World War II and the mid-1970s. By the standards of most people in the world, the population of the USSR lives comparatively well: is housed, shod, clothed, transported, cured, amused at standards that are better than those of most of Latin America, let alone Asia and Africa. The populations of Eastern Europe lived even better, in part, of course, through systematic subsidizing of their economies by the USSR.

On the international level, the situation is also mixed. It is worth recalling that when the Second Cold War began in the late 1970s it was common currency in the West that this was a result of a new

Soviet strength in the world, manifested above all in greater strategic military power, and in an enhanced situation in the third world. Soviet missiles, the strategic SS-18 and the intermediate-range SS-20, had shifted the balance in Moscow's favour. In the third world the wave of revolutions of the latter half of the 1970s marked the end of *pax americana* and a new Soviet international reach. Afghanistan was seen as the culmination of this new Soviet power. That many Soviet officials, including Brezhnev, appeared to believe this gave it added credibility. America was weak. The West was on the run. There was much talk of an end to 'US hegemony', on the left as on the right. A partial shift in America's relative position in some spheres was turned into an absolute loss of power, both vis-à-vis other capitalist competitors, such as Japan, and vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

Much of this was nonsense, a deliberate exaggeration of Soviet power and a misrepresentation of developments in the third world and in the nuclear field, serving to raise alarm and either, on the left, obscure the continued dominance of the USA, or, on the right, justify what turned out to be a new Western offensive against the USSR. Nonetheless, the image of growing Soviet international strength in the 1970s was not entirely mythical or imagined: it corresponded to real advances in Soviet capabilities. In historical perspective it was not Khrushchev, Lenin or even Stalin who caused the greatest difficulties to the West outside Europe, but the much maligned Brezhnev. It was Soviet arms and support that enabled the triumph of the Vietnamese, and which greatly facilitated the victories of Mozambique, Angola and, via Cuba, in Nicaragua. Even in the late 1980s the consequences of that internationalist commitment can be seen: despite the last-minute attempts of Western governments to claim credit for it, the dramatic turn of events in South Africa in 1990 owes not a little to the long-run military support given to nationalist movements there, against Lisbon and Pretoria, in the 1960s and early 1970s. It is to Brezhnev, as much as anyone else outside South Africa itself, that credit for cracking the racist bloc should go.

### The Terminal Crisis

The question therefore arises of why it was in the 1980s, when the Soviet system was in an apparently sustainable position, that the final collapse took place. This is an issue that bears on the analyses of Cold War II produced a decade ago, since it was too rarely seen just how brittle the overall Soviet position had become. In retrospect, this is, in my view, the greatest weakness of my own analysis, in *The Making of the Second Cold War*. The assumption was that, even as Western assertions of a new aggressive Soviet power were unfounded, the Soviet system as a whole was sufficiently viable that it would continue to reproduce itself as it then was in the USSR and other bloc countries. In part, this judgement was accurate. The Soviet system did not fail in any absolute sense: its populations were not in revolt, its economies were providing an adequate if restricted supply of goods. Levels of economic inequality and crime were less than in developed capitalist states. Its historical record was a fair one. It was showing considerable ability to adapt politically. Its international strength was greater than

even before. Yet the fact is that by the end of the 1980s it was in what appeared to be a terminal crisis, unable to defy capitalism internationally or to reproduce itself at home.

As with any such process, and most obviously with the breakdown of states after long war, it is possible to look back over what seem to be years of stalemate and divine the sources of later breakdown. Two obvious reasons for the collapse suggest themselves. The first, the classic Marxist one that is too easily forgotten in current benign times, was that in the early 1980s the West launched an offensive to weaken and paralyse the Soviet Union. In the nuclear field, the USA explicitly went for 'superiority' over the USSR. The West pushed ahead with its new programmes, euphemistically described as 'modernization', and Reagan further turned the screw by propounding and threatening to develop a system of strategic defence that would have ended the policy of deterrence hitherto prevailing. In the third world US intervention, at various levels, ended the wave of revolutions: after that in Zimbabwe, in 1980, there were no further such upheavals, either as a result of direct repression, as in El Salvador, or through the diversion of revolutionary processes by reform candidates, as in the Philippines, Haiti and South Korea. At the same time, the 'Reagan Doctrine' was developed to justify pressure on third world revolutionary states: arms were sent to guerrillas opposing pro-Soviet regimes in four states—Cambodia, Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua. Washington developed a policy of eroding Soviet power 'on the margin', meaning by this the third world socialist allies. Hundreds of thousands of people died and millions were displaced from their homes, as a result of these counter-revolutionary wars of the 1980s. The result of the February 1990 election in Nicaragua was, above all else, a result of such pressure: it represented an exhaustion, after 30,000 people had died at the hands of the *contra*. This counter-revolution was distinct from those in Chile, Guatemala and Indonesia not because it was peaceful, but because the massacres occurred before, not after, the overthrow of the revolutionary regime.

The second argument, found in both Soviet and Western writings, focuses on an internal process, an entropy. This is that in some sense the communist model ran out of steam in the 1980s, exhausted itself after four to eight decades of dynamism. The most obvious signs of this were the economic gridlock that appeared to have beset the USSR and other Comecon states and the attendant social and ecological problems. The sources of growth previously available had been used up: surplus agricultural populations, initial forms of industrialization, Western loans and selectively applied technology. Contemporary with this economic stagnation, the ecological problems produced by decades of intensive pillage of nature manifested themselves, from the pollution of rivers in south-east GDR to the inexorable contraction of the Aral Sea. Social problems also emerged out of decades of neglect: falling birth-rates, declining life expectancy, growing crime. Above all, there was an exhaustion of political credit: historically, the communist movement had derived impetus from specific events—the Bolshevik revolution itself, and the defeat of fascism. Later successes—the initial lead in space exploration after 1957, the spread of communist



and socialist ideas in the third world—appeared to confirm this forward march. From the 1960s onwards, however, this prospect of historical advance was checked: the building of the Berlin wall in 1961, the crushing of the Czechoslovak experiment in 1968 marked the end of that optimism.

It took perhaps two decades or more for it to become evident not just that the 'communist' system had lost its dynamic but, and this is the crucial point, that it was not going to regain it. The last great expression of communist optimism was that of Khrushchev, with his triumphalist perspectives on peaceful coexistence proclaimed at the 22nd Party Congress of 1961. Three decades later that vision appears to be empty, based on an exaggeration of the potential of Soviet society, and an unfounded belief in historical determinism. Not only did the 'transition' fail to complete itself, but it was unable to retain the territory it had gained.

### An International Failure

These factors alone, subsumed under the Gorbachevian term 'stagnation', cannot, however, provide an adequate explanation of the collapse of 'communism' in the late 1980s. 'Stagnation' is a simplistic term implying a degree of homogeneity within the 'communist' states that is invalid. The degree of stagnation was not so great, or so comprehensive, that it would have led to such an outcome. Indeed, on purely internal criteria, it *was* quite plausible to imagine that the Soviet system, in the USSR itself and in the bloc, could have continued for years and decades to come, liberalizing to a degree but retaining the essential features of domestic and international orthodoxy. In other words, endogenous factors on their own cannot account for the final collapse. What was determinant, and what put stagnation into a wholly different light, was the global context, and in particular the relative record of 'communism' compared with its competitor, advanced capitalism. This, above all, determined the events of the late 1980s.

At the theoretical level, communist parties had operated with two assumptions that were shown to be fatally flawed: one was of the inevitable crisis and secular decline of capitalism; the other was of the ability of the communist countries to constitute an alternative, rival and self-contained bloc, independent of the capitalist world. It was on this basis that many communists who recognized the apparent superiority of capitalism in the postwar epoch could still retain their original optimism, in the belief that capitalist success was either a mirage, a result of 'manipulation' (which certainly exists) alone, or of a temporary penultimate speculative boom: if the socialist camp could hold on long enough, they argued, then the capitalist world would enter its crisis, a new socialist dynamic would emerge, and the initial scenario, long delayed and diverted, would nonetheless be played out.

In fact, the postwar epoch disproved both assumptions and, in so doing, pointed to what is the central failing of Marxism. It is commonplace to say that Marxism's greatest mistake was the underestimation of nationalism: this is a dubious claim, since liberalism

also did this, and it depreciates the justified scepticism about nationalism that runs through the socialist tradition. Marx's scorn for nationalist illusions and Lenin's denunciation of 'nationalist bickering' seem rather apposite today. The greatest mistake of Marxist and socialist thinking was not the underestimation of nationalism nor the overestimation of socialism and its potential but rather the underestimation of capitalism itself, both in terms of its potential for continued expansion and in terms of its not having within it a catastrophist teleology: in the apt words of Bill Warren, "'Late capitalism", late for what?' In terms of economic performance, the advanced capitalist countries enjoyed an unparalleled period of growth in the postwar epoch, and the downturns were short-lived and relatively shallow. While income inequalities continued and indeed grew, the majority of the population in these countries enjoyed rising real standards of living. This economic success was matched by political success: the completion, in the postwar epoch, of the extension of universal suffrage in the advanced capitalist states, the acceptance by the overwhelming majority of the populations of these countries of the legitimacy of capitalist democracy, and the shedding, in a remarkably short space of time, of formal colonial control over Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. While capitalism has signally failed to contain the immiseration of a part of the third world's population, especially in Africa and the Asian sub-continent, the spread of capitalist democracy to much of the third world has proven another dimension of strength: in addition to the limitations of third world revolutionary regimes, the evident capacity of capitalist economics and politics has served to reduce the appeals of socialism even in those regions where, in the postwar era, it has enjoyed greatest success.

The link between the political and the economic was consolidated by a change in the character of capitalist hegemony itself, i.e. in the mechanisms by which the rule of capital was maintained and produced, and in particular in the values and institutions that were seen to embody the legitimacy of the system. As old social barriers and identities eroded, an increasing role came to be taken by forms of activity associated with communications and consumer culture: the power of TV, pop music and fashion was always dependent upon other forms of power, but it nonetheless acquired a greater relative weight within Western society as a whole. This was an economic-political combination in which the mass of everyday needs appeared to be met by the existing system and in which a degree of choice, exaggerated and massaged as it was, prevailed. The whole image of a socialism 'catching up with and overtaking' capitalism was doubly flawed: first, it was not able to catch up even in the narrowest, most traditional, quantitative terms such as industrial output or food production; but, secondly, the very terms of the competition, the criteria according to which the competition was being judged, not least by the populations ruled over by communist parties, were themselves changing.

This success within capitalism was therefore one to which 'communist' society was especially vulnerable. It could not compete economically, in terms of output and technological change. It could compete even less in the newly promoted domains of consumerism and popular culture. Of greatest concern to Soviet leaders was the import of this

for the most vital area of competition, above all, military competition: matching the West in quantity let alone technological quality became harder and harder. 'Communism' could not compete politically, since its initial revolutionary successes failed to develop into functioning, alternative, systems of democracy: 'polibureaucratic' dictatorship, to use Bahro's phrase, prevailed throughout the system. Even less could it compete in the new fields pioneered by capitalist advance: consumer culture on the one hand, the third industrial revolution and the spread of information technology on the other. Nor, and this is in many ways the fatal point, could 'communist' societies constitute an alternative international bloc. In terms of economic activity, the Soviet bloc never constituted a dynamic trading bloc capable of rivaling the West. It always occupied a defensive, subaltern place in the international economy. It lagged behind, and was condemned to copy, in the field of technology. The Soviet bloc was simply too weak and its internal mechanisms too rigid to allow of such a development.

At the same time, the countries of the bloc could not insulate themselves from the capitalist world. In the most obvious field of all, communications, it became more and more possible for people within communist states to hear and see what was happening in the outside world. The impact of West German TV in much of the GDR and Czechoslovakia, or of Finnish in Estonia, were examples of this. Pop music provided a direct means of reaching the young in the communist world. With higher levels of education and increasing opportunities for travel the comparison between living standards, and political conditions, in the communist and advanced capitalist states became more evident. It was this comparative, rather than absolute, failure that provided the basis for the collapse of the late 1980s: not only did it foment discontent with a system that was seen as bankrupt, but it destroyed the belief that in some broader secular sense the communist system could ever catch up with, let alone overtake, the West.

The international determination of this crisis was not, however, only a result of the failure of the Soviet bloc to compete: the very crisis itself had key international dimensions. First, the overthrow of communist party rule in Eastern Europe, for all that it was made from below, would have been impossible without the change in Soviet policy propounded in late 1988, according to which the USSR would not intervene to maintain these regimes in power. The old politbureaus could not go on ruling in the old way: Gorbachev's change of policy was the indispensable precondition for the changes to occur. Secondly, as in other revolutionary situations, the demonstration effect of successful cases was of great importance, with each taking the process a stage further: first, Hungarian liberalization from above, then the election of the Solidarity government in Poland, then the, comparatively, slow erosion of the SED through mass emigration in the summer and later demonstrations, then the much speedier Czech upheaval, and finally the sudden, bloody change in Romania. The international dimension was, moreover, significant in a third and in this case distinctive way, namely in providing a stimulus to the upheavals from the capitalist bloc: most postwar revolutions had taken place against the West, and paid the price of defying the hegemonic bloc; the revolts of 1989 were

against the rule of communist parties, and were facilitated in their course and subsequent stabilization by the encouragement and welcome they received or which the populations believed they would receive from the West, in diplomatic, military and financial terms.

### Alternatives, Real and Imaginary

Several consequences follow from this comparative failure of the 'communist' experiment. The first is that the conventional alternative to Brezhnevite orthodoxy, namely 'socialism with a human face', in the sense in which this was meant by Dubček in 1968, is, and was always, implausible. For what 'socialism with a human face' meant was a maintenance of the communist party in power, but pursuing more humane and democratic policies. This belief in democracy plus party control is a constant of liberal communist politics: from Khrushchev and the Prague Spring in the 1960s, to Bahro's *Alternative* in the 1970s, to the initial formulations of *perestroika* after 1985. In a world where the alternative attraction of a capitalist system, and a functioning capitalist multiparty option, existed, i.e. with the possibility of the communist party being voted out of power entirely, such an option was a half-way house, an unsustainable compromise. All the talk of mixed economies and the like in the West obscures the fact that political alternation takes place within a relatively unchanged socio-economic system: it is possible to vary the former once every four or five years; it is not possible to reverse out of one socio-economic system to the other in the same way. Either the communist party, with a human or inhuman face, had to insist that it alone ruled, or it had to allow the possibility of being removed from power once and for all. The implication of this is that arguments to the effect that the system could have been saved in the 1960s are of dubious validity: if Khrushchev had continued and been more consistent, or if Brezhnev had not invaded Czechoslovakia, the system would still have been subjected to pressures from outside that would have denied it a stable, reformed, communist trajectory.

The second consequence concerns the fate of 'communism' outside the Soviet bloc, and in particular in Western Europe. It has long been a claim of liberal or reform communism that the imposition of political dictatorship in the name of socialism in the East has inhibited the development of communism in the West. A political opening in the East would, it was claimed, make it easier for Eurocommunist and other currents. The historical record rather contradicts this: as already noted, communist parties were at the peak of their influence in the West under Stalin, and have suffered a steady erosion ever since, *pari passu* with the liberalizations of Khrushchev and Gorbachev. Indeed the final crisis of communist orthodoxy in Eastern Europe in 1989 seems to have led to a new round of crisis within the West European communist parties. The reasons for this paradox are not hard to find. It is not so much that communist success in the West was based on admiration, covert or overt, for belligerent dictatorship in the East, a frisson of authoritarian identification, though few could deny this played its part, but rather that it rested on the belief in a viable, historically progressive, alternative. It is the destruction of that

belief in the 1980s which has undermined the credibility of communism in the West. The other reason for the apparently paradoxical record of communist parties is a little harder to specify: it pertains to the fact that an essential precondition for any viable socialism in the West is a degree of combativity towards the very system it is challenging, namely capitalism. Whatever their other faults, the traditional communist parties embodied that quality. What is most marked about the communist parties of Western Europe today is not their greater criticism of the Soviet past, but their lack of any radical hostility to capitalism itself.

### New Era, Old Problems

This turning point in modern history, and unravelling of the consequences of World War I and World War II, is being received with almost universal rejoicing, in east as well as west. The end of the cold war, the onset of a new era of international harmony, even in some neo-Hegelian sense the end of history are being promised. The least that can be said is that if we are to return to a pre-1914 world then there are some obvious dangers. It was that world of inter-capitalist conflict undistracted by the existence of a socialist rival that gave rise to decades of colonial plunder and the great war itself. It ushered in what others have called the European civil war of 1914-1945, but which was, as any Chinese or Vietnamese will point out, rather more than that. The anxieties expressed about German and Japanese power hardly promise a calm twenty-first century. More immediately, there is the growing prominence of another, less tractable challenge to international peace, namely ethnic and communal conflict. The collapse of Soviet power has been accompanied by the outburst of nationalism and ethnic conflict throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR itself; simultaneously, much of the post-colonial third world is riven by ethnic violence that shows no sign of coming to an end. Indeed if one of the hallmarks of the late 1980s has been the ending of cold war, the other has been the resurgence of nationalist sentiment in much of the developed as well as developing world: from the chauvinist excesses of sporting occasions in Britain to the revival of great power arrogance in the USA, Japan and Germany it has become a commonplace of politics in the developed world. It lurks too in other contexts—from the misplaced indulgence of religious bigotry masquerading as anti-racism shown by sections of the liberal intelligentsia, to the pursuit of 'national traditions' by erstwhile components of the international communist movement.

Underlying these political conflicts and trends there lies the most fundamental issue of all, one which the communist movement was founded to confront and which is now placed in question by the end of the cold war and the suffocation of the 'communist' bloc attendant upon it. This is the question of political possibilities, and in particular the degree to which the model of advanced capitalism now on the ascendancy is open to criticism in the name of a desirable, and plausible, alternative. The critique of capitalism was the starting point of Marxism and socialism and is the point to which, quite properly, that tradition can now return. It is striking how, amidst the triumph of

consumer capitalism and the collapse of 'communism', the possibility of aberrations is now being submerged in the name of a new international political and cultural conformity: all aspire to, and supposedly endorse, a composite transnational utopia, distilled from, and defined by, the lifestyles of California, Rheinland-Westfalen and Surrey. That this new utopia contains profound structures of inequality, defined on class, sex, race and regional bases, is evident, but repressed in most prevailing public discourses. The determination with which this utopia is projected and defended—from the reporting of events to the presentation of statistics—would alone suggest that it is an artificial and vulnerable construct. Its prevalence means, however, that alternatives are excluded and denigrated.

In the precipitate retreat from orthodox communism, much that was positive and necessary is being abandoned: a commitment to social justice, insistence on the exclusion of religion from public life, the promotion by the state of equality of men and women, internationalism and solidarity, to name but four. The assertion of a need to intervene to plan and direct economic activity is now almost universally rejected, at a time when the cosmic destructiveness of production has never been more evident. What is occurring on these fronts in the 'communist' countries is not an advance, but a recidivism of epochal proportions. One can search the columns of a, in other respects, refreshing *Moscow News* to find mention of anything of merit in the Bolshevik record and tradition. In the advanced capitalist world, there has been a disappearance of credible political and social agencies for change. The working class has been to a considerable degree marginalized and fragmented, its organizational and legal powers cut back. The 'new social movements', forces that identified and challenged hitherto denied forms of oppression but whose coherence and potential were much overrated, are now dispersed. New social forces of the radical right, both political and religious, are evident in most of these states. Equally, there is a paucity of ideas as to how contemporary society should and could be organized on a different political and economic basis. Neither from social democratic parties in the West, nor from Gorbachevite reforms in the East, does a clear and credible critique of present-day capitalism emerge.

This is a curious and ominous development, a triumph of ideological simplification. Capitalism it was, after all, which brought us in the nineteenth century the massacres of indigenous populations on three continents, and two world wars in this century. Capitalism it is which has signally failed to diffuse its wealth so as to reduce the gap between rich and poor on a world scale, and which still conducts its daily business on the basis of adolescent frenzy and inanity in the marketplace, now brought to us every hour in the guise of 'financial news'. The communist movement was an attempt to present a challenge to that system and to erect an alternative, more desirable and viable, that would replace the anarchy and viciousness of capitalism with a more humane and rationally directed form of economic activity. For seven decades it has presented such a challenge, but in the end it appears to have foundered. In the form in which it emerged, it is, in the eyes of the overwhelming mass of the populations of East and West, neither

more desirable nor more viable than advanced capitalism. The relentless flood of young people from the GDR to the West, rejecting an oppression and constriction identified with socialism, contains a momentous historical lesson. Even in the area of greatest success, military competition, it was only able to compete partially and intermittently.

It is perhaps premature to draw up a measured historical materialist assessment of what the communist experiment has represented. It was a partial, impatient and distorted challenge to the dominant system of our epoch, one whose development and demise only confirms Marx's initial instinct that a challenge to capitalism would have to erupt and consolidate itself on a global level if it were to succeed. In the name of exaggerated economic and political potential, and of a mistaken teleology, the communist societies presented themselves as being a form of society superior to and historically beyond capitalism. 'Non-capitalist' they certainly were, but 'post-capitalist' they were not: in many respects they resembled forms of early capitalism, with their reliance on military and repressive power, their failure to generate technological change, and their lack of functioning mechanisms of international economic integration. After decades of partial success, they now appear to have succumbed to a mode of production and a political system far stronger than them, and which does not appear to be headed for any predetermined exhaustion or crisis.

What this necessitates, and provides the opportunity for, is a reassessment and realignment not only of Marxism and the socialist movement but of the radical and revolutionary traditions within Western society as a whole. A keen student of political upheavals in Germany, and an unwavering believer in the determinance of socio-economic factors, Marx at least would not have been so surprised by the events of the past few months. After its long and painful historical detour, the communist tradition can now return to its point of origin, the critique of, and challenge to, capitalist political economy. The central question is whether, and how far, there does exist an alternative to the predominant model of capitalism and, if so, what social agencies can be mobilized democratically to create and maintain it. Much of the reassessment of classical Marxism has taken the form of building or re-establishing links with contemporary forms of resistance hitherto separate from the Marxist tradition—social-democracy, cast out in 1914, and currents of the post-1945 epoch, amongst them feminism, ecology and anti-racism. Of equal importance, however, is the recognition of how relevant pre-Marxist radical currents may be, and especially so in the face of the resurgent challenges of the time, clericalism, nationalism and irrationalism. As much as the estranged cousins of the twentieth century, it is important to bring back the supposedly discarded *aufgehobene* ancestors of the eighteenth. If the end of cold war does nothing else but clarify that question, and emancipate socialism from false and deterministic answers and doomed loyalties, it will have prepared a substantial agenda for the twenty-first century. The task of reflection, theoretical and political, upon the events of the late 1980s has only just begun and analysis of their import must, of necessity, be provisional. The one thing that cannot be underestimated is the challenge that they pose.

# **GPC** GREENWOOD PUBLISHING GROUP

## **FROM FEUDALISM TO CAPITALISM**

**Marxian Theories of Class Struggle & Social Change**

**Claudio J. Katz**

1990 0-313-26423-6 Hbk £34.95

A new reading of Karl Marx's theory of history, this book re-examines two incompatible versions of historical materialism: one ascribes the primary cause of historical development to technological progress, the other to class struggle.

**Greenwood Press**

## **THE CHALLENGE OF EXCEPTION**

**An Introduction to the Political Ideas of Carl Schmitt Between 1921 and 1936**

**George Schwab**

1989 0-313-27229-8 Hbk £33.50

*Contributions in Political Science. No.248*

This book discusses the ideas of Carl Schmitt and relates their centrality to politics and the state, to the political theory of liberalism, democracy and authoritarianism, and to international relations.

**Greenwood Press**

## **BERLIN:**

**From Symbol of Confrontation to Keystone of Stability**

**James S. Sutterlin & David Klein**

1989 0-275-93259-1 Hbk £39.95

An examination of the relationship between the Western powers and the Soviet Union with regard to Berlin, from WWII to the 1971 Four Power Agreement, ending with an assessment of its implications for the future.

**Praeger Publishers**

Please write to the address given below for further information on titles published by the Greenwood Press Publishing Group

**3 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8LT.**

**Tel: 071- 240 0856/Fax: 379 0609**



Mary Kaldor

## After the Cold War

East Europeans always emphasize the power of words. This has been the essence of much of Havel's political writings. The way we describe the world, the words we use, shape how we see the world and how we decide to act. Words and history—a collection of words used to describe the past—have demonstrated their power in East-Central Europe over the last few months.

The Cold War has always been a discourse, a conflict of words, 'capitalism' versus 'socialism'. Both left and right used the same words. They disagreed about which word was good and which was bad. Even though the Western Left was, for the most part, sharply critical of Stalinism, it still characterized the Cold War as a conflict between capitalism and socialism. It described the West as 'capitalist' and the East as 'socialist', and explained the conflict in terms of the expansionary nature of capital and the unwillingness of capitalism to tolerate any alternative.

Now the political systems in Central Europe have collapsed and the Soviet system is under severe challenge. The Right is claiming the revolutions of 1989 as its victory. What is happening, according to mainstream commentators, is the decisive defeat of socialism and the triumph of liberal (actually neo-liberal) values and policies. Fukuyama, the new favourite author of the neo-liberal Right, talks about the 'end of history' and the final victory of the 'universal homogeneous state', defined as 'liberal democracy in the political sphere combined with easy access to VCR's and stereos in the economic.'<sup>1</sup>

It is very important in this climate of euphoric opinion to think again about the words and their meanings and to redefine recent history. What is it that has collapsed? Socialism? Yes, if what we mean by socialism is nationalization, central planning, bureaucracy, paternalism, the belief in the ability of government experts to solve social and economic problems. Socialism, in this sense, has collapsed in both East and West. More gradually in the West, under pressure both from the neo-liberal right and the post-1968 generation of social movements. Explosively in the East, once these systems were no longer propped up in fact by the Soviet Union.

And what has won? Liberal values have certainly won. But has capitalism won? In what sense can the West be described as 'capitalist'? In Western countries, including the United States, government spending averages 40 per cent of Gross Domestic Product. Has the neo-liberal approach of Thatcher and Reagan won? Or have Japan, West Germany and other successful West European economies won? These economies are capitalist in the sense that they are market-oriented and dominated by large private corporations. But compared with the United States or Britain, much greater emphasis is placed on education, social services, public investment, local planning, worker participation, and so on.

And what does it mean to say the West has won? Does it mean that the West is stronger economically or militarily? Does it mean that Western strategies contributed to the downfall of socialism? Or does it mean that East European countries will adopt a Western political and economic model? And, if so, which model? The East Europeans want Western liberal values. But do they want Americanization or Swedish social democracy? And what will they get? 'Third Worldization' or 'Mexicanization', as some are suggesting? Or perhaps an entirely new indigenous model of economic and social organization?

The answers to these questions are not yet determined. Indeed what is taking place, in the aftermath of 1989, is a political struggle for the future of Europe. Whether 1989 was a victory for the neo-liberal Right, to be found not only in the West but among official reformers and old-fashioned nationalists in the East, or a victory for the new-style social movements that came to prominence in the 1980s, whether East-Central Europe is to be annexed, economically, socially and culturally, by the West, or whether we can expect a new evolution of

---

<sup>1</sup> Extracted in *The Independent*, 20 and 21 September 1989

systems in both East and West—all this depends on politics, on our own contributions to the debates and campaigns of the 1990s. In what follows, I shall explore these questions in relation to the East, the West and, finally, the East–West relationship.

Gorbachev was the trigger for the revolutions of 1989. He signalled his unwillingness to underwrite the old regimes. His spokesman Gerassimov talked about the Sinatra Doctrine 'I had it my way'. And evidence is accumulating that in October 1989, he intervened to prevent a German Tiananmen Square (I am told that hospitals were, at that time, being mobilized to expect some 100,000 casualties). It was after this that the fear pervading East Germany and Czechoslovakia began to evaporate. 'I feel more happy than frightened but a bit frightened as well'—a young Czech peace activist told me during the second week of November.

Once the fear had gone, the regimes toppled one by one like a house of cards. Their collapse revealed the emptiness of the prevailing systems, the fact that change was long overdue.

### A War Economy

What was the system that characterized the so-called People's Democracies of East-Central Europe? It was a weird and brutal kind of socialism that was imposed in the late 1940s on the countries occupied by the Red Army during World War II. The system was the outcome of a peculiar mixture of Russian history, socialist ideas, and the specific experience of war.

Oskar Lange described the Stalinist system as a war economy.<sup>2</sup> By this he meant that it resembled the wartime organization of capitalist countries in its concentration of all resources to avoid leakages to anything considered non-essential, i.e. not connected to the prosecution of the war. Lange was of the view that the 'methods of the war economy' were 'necessary in a revolutionary period of transition'. But he did not think these methods were intrinsically socialist. For example, compulsory deliveries of food were introduced 'by the occupation Army of Kaiser Wilhelm the Second whom I do not think anybody regards as a champion of socialism'.

The analogy of the war economy can be taken further, in the sense that the system was geared for war and only really functioned efficiently in wartime. Readiness for war was the primary goal of the Stalinist system from 1928 onwards. Even today, military spending, according to official estimates which are thought to be low, amounts to 12–15 per cent of Net Material Product. Industrialization was determined by the need to prepare for war. Moreover, the wartime atmosphere, the notion of an ever-present external threat, provided a basis for social cohesion and discipline and a legitimation for oppression.

---

<sup>2</sup> In a lecture given in Belgrade in 1957, one year after Gomulka's accession to power. Lange was then made head of the Planning Commission. See 'Role of Planning in a Socialist Economy', Oskar Lange, ed., *Problems of Political Economy of Socialism*, New Delhi 1962.

The newly created Soviet Union was, of course, internationally beleaguered and threatened militarily from abroad. Yet, in explaining the emergence of a war economy in the late 1920s and the 1930s, it is difficult to disentangle the role of outside pressures from the Russian heritage. Tsarism was, after all, shaped by the need to protect Russia from invasion. Paranoia, insecurity, war psychosis had nurtured the rulers of Russia, the state apparatus, and even the Russian revolutionaries for generations.

In fact, despite the pre-war efforts, the Red Army was unprepared for the German invasion in 1942. Soviet weapons proved inferior to German weapons and the Soviet arms industry was destroyed in the first few weeks of the war. The system, however, displayed an extraordinary capacity for recovery. The arms industries were moved to the East and the design of weapons was adapted to the experience of battle. In the end, Soviet war production was comparable to American war production and, although lendlease was important, this was primarily an indigenous effort. Thus the experience of war appeared to confirm the pre-war predilections of the systems.

The imposition of Stalinism on East-Central Europe was probably inevitable once the Soviet Union had occupied these territories in the early 1940s. From an early date, communists were put in charge of the police and the armies. Brutality and fear are self-reproducing. The argument of such diverse writers as Hannah Arendt and Fernando Claudín that Stalinism could not tolerate alternatives for fear of revealing the truth about past crimes is rather convincing. The communists were held together, says Šimečka, by 'above all, an awareness of sharing the "original sin"'.<sup>3</sup>

All the same, Western behaviour helped. Although, technically, it was the Russians who refused to allow the East-Central European countries to accept Marshall Aid, it is now clear that the Americans (and the British) imposed conditions that they hoped the Russians would refuse.<sup>4</sup> The East European countries were much poorer than the West European countries and had suffered proportionately more war damage. In the absence of Western aid, the methods of the war economy were the most obvious to deal with the horrendous problem of reconstruction. The establishment of the Cominform and Zhdanov's Two Camps Doctrine took place after the decision not to provide Marshall Aid to East-Central Europe. Subsequently, the formation of NATO, the introduction of nuclear weapons into Western Europe, and the rearmament of West Germany substantiated the Western-threat hypothesis and reinforced the psychosis of war.

During the years 1948–52, the Stalinist system was imposed on East-Central Europe down to the last detail, in the name of the struggle for socialism against capitalism. Plans for autarkic self-sufficient

---

<sup>3</sup> Milan Šimečka's 'From Class Obsessions to Dialogue: Detente and the Changing Political Culture of Eastern Europe', in Kaldor, Holden and Falk: *The New Detente: Rethinking East-West Relations*, Verso, London 1989.

<sup>4</sup> See William C. Cronwell, 'The Marshall Plan, Britain and the Cold War', *Review of International Studies* (1982), 8. See also George Kennan's account in *Memories*, Vol. 1, Hutchinson, London 1968.

industrial development were drawn up (often replacing national plans) with considerable emphasis on steel and heavy industry and, after Korea, the production of armaments. Agriculture was forcibly collectivized. Autonomous private life, such as cafés or non-political clubs, was strictly curtailed. Soviet army regulations were imposed on East European armed forces and Soviet army officers were put in positions of command. 'Home' Communists were purged and Soviet control was tightened over local Parties, the security forces and the nomenklatura system. Personality cults were introduced in all East European countries in which local leaders basked in Stalin's reflected light.

### Eastern Europe after Stalin

The history of Soviet-type systems after 1952 is a history of attempts to escape the Stalinist inheritance. It is a history in which the ruling parties sought to remain in power while correcting some of the worst abuses of the system—the paranoid atmosphere which engulfed the rulers as well as the ruled, and the intractable economic problems which they faced once the immediacy of war had been removed. All these countries were subject to perennial shortages because of the inherent tendency in planned economies to exceed planned expenditure. (This is similar to the cost-overflow problem in Western defence industries. Investment plans are always underestimated either deliberately in order to 'hook on' to the plan or because of unforeseen difficulties or merely because there are no penalties for excess cost as in a market economy.<sup>3</sup>) In the absence of war and of democracy, the goals of the plan are no longer determined by the requirements of battle, but by bureaucratic pressures based on Stalinist structures. Today, the Soviet budget deficit is estimated to be 20 per cent of Net Material Production. The corollary to shortage is waste and inefficiency and an inherent tendency to squeeze consumption and agriculture in order to fulfil investment plans. Hence, the typical cycle of investment drives followed by austerity.

Since 1953, there have been periodic attempts at reform, generally involving the introduction of a market element into the planning system. These reforms included the replacement of administrative directives by financial indicators, greater autonomy for enterprises, tolerance towards small-scale private enterprise, liberalization of agriculture (decollectivization, abolition of compulsory deliveries, acceptance of private plots, etc.), liberalization of foreign trade, greater emphasis on consumption. The reforms went furthest in Hungary. But in all cases, the momentum was halted by bureaucratic resistance in the absence of political reform. Without a central shift in the goals of the plan, which was impossible without political change, the reforms could do little else than marginally increase the efficiency with which the plans were fulfilled. And any serious attempt at political reform was liable to be crushed—as became evident in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968. In some senses, 1968

<sup>3</sup> For a theoretical exposition of this problem, see Janos Kornai, *The Economics of Shortage*, Amsterdam 1989, and Tamas Bauer, 'Investment Cycles in Planned Economics', *Acta Oeconomica* 21, No. 3, 1978.

was the crucial turning point, when the Brezhnev regime turned its back on reform and remaining hopes for the democratization of socialism were dashed. It was after 1968 that opposition shifted from revisionism to outright dissidence.

The detente of the 1970s can be interpreted as an attempt to substitute imports for reform, to raise standards of living through the mechanism of what Brezhnev called the 'foreign reserve' while maintaining tight political control. By solving short-term bottlenecks, meeting immediate consumer demands (as in Poland) and importing Western technology, it was hoped to overcome shortage. However, imports created a chain of supplementary demand (for parts, appropriate raw materials, etc.) and, in the absence of reform, it was extremely difficult to assimilate Western technology. Moreover, the post-1973 recession in Western Europe, competition with Southern Europe as well as the newly industrializing countries of the Far East (who were competing for the same low-cost manufactured goods patch of the market), and the new protectionism made it impossible to generate sufficient exports to pay for increased imports. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, all the East European countries were forced to cut back on trade with the West and to introduce austerity policies. All, in varying degrees, were heavily indebted, although the problem was less serious in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Romania managed to repay the debt through a particularly virulent return to nationalist totalitarianism.

So it was that by the middle of the 1980s, all avenues of change short of democracy had been exhausted. The remaining shreds of legitimacy, the remaining claims for socialism disappeared with the cuts in welfare and consumption that were introduced in the years of austerity. Despite Reagan's efforts to help these regimes with his nuclear war-fighting strategies and his aggressive rhetoric, the last remnants of belief in a Western threat vanished along with increased trade and travel. One had only to observe the joy on both sides of Berlin when the wall was opened up to realize that ~~no one~~, any more, believed in a conflict between East and West.

### The Atlanticist Compromise

If Stalinism came to fruition in World War II, the system that came to predominate in the Atlantic region was also profoundly shaped by the Anglo-American experience of that war. Atlanticism can be viewed as more than a geographical alliance. It constituted a specific phase of capitalist history, a specific statist variant of capitalism. It can be described as a kind of compromise between Fordism and Fabianism.

World War II solved the problems of the Depression, which had been caused by a disjuncture between production and consumption, between economics and politics. The huge expansion of productivity in the United States which was the consequence of the growth of Fordist methods of production was not matched by a corresponding increase in demand. This was both because of the domestic distribution of income within the United States and because international institutions still reflected the dominance of Britain. But then the big

increase in military spending and the provision of Lendlease mopped up unemployment in the United States. It also encouraged the spread of mass production techniques and new inventions like the computer and radar which were to have profound implications after the war. For the duration of the Second World War, US income increased by 65 per cent. At the end of the war, the US accounted for 40–45 per cent of world output, and enjoyed a huge trade surplus.

The Cold War reproduced the World War II experience. NATO provided a mechanism for a continuous transfer of resources from the US to Europe, to sustain demand in the US and to underpin the global financial system. It was a way of coping with the dollar shortage. NATO also encouraged the creation of a common infrastructure and a common set of technological priorities which facilitated the spread of Fordist methods of production.

This is not to suggest that what happened was mechanistic, that the Cold War began for economic reasons. (It is true, however, that Bevin, for example, seems to have regarded the Soviet threat as a way of persuading the Americans to make a permanent economic commitment to Europe.) There were other ways in which pre-war economic problems could have been solved—through welfare spending, for example, or through an international clearing union, as proposed by Keynes.

The reasons for the Cold War were political and they had to do with both American and European domestic politics. The American political spectrum shifted to the right immediately after the war and the European political spectrum shifted dramatically to the left. Socialist or left-leaning coalition governments in West Europe introduced various mixtures of planning, nationalization and welfare policies. On the one hand, anti-communism enabled a bipartisan consensus in the United States. It was a way of persuading the Republican right to support a global role for the United States. On the other hand, it was a way of persuading the United States to make a long-term economic commitment to Western Europe, despite differences of political outlook. Anti-communism was a way of legitimizing Labour or socialist governments in Britain, France, Italy and the Netherlands, vis-à-vis the United States. In practice, the Cold War divided the Left in Western Europe and allowed for the partial rehabilitation of the pre-war West European establishments. Radical policies were curbed: welfare gave way to warfare. During the 1950s, a new Atlanticist elite was formed with a common commitment to managed capitalism and to high levels of military spending.

J.K. Galbraith's book *The New Industrial State*, published in 1969, envisaged a new convergence between East and West around the planning system which characterizes both large corporations and the modern state. What he observed, it can be argued, were the institutions associated with Fordist patterns of production which were shaped by the shared legacy of World War II.

Unlike in the East, economic restructuring has taken place in the West during the 1970s and 1980s. Fordist patterns of industrial

development have been increasingly replaced by more flexible, decentralized resource-saving methods of production, applicable to both manufacturing and services, and based on the revolution in what are known as information technologies.<sup>6</sup> The pole of capitalist accumulation has shifted from the United States to Japan and, to a lesser extent, West Germany and the smaller West European countries.

Instead of facilitating the international economic system, the Cold War now represents a cause of economic problems. Continued high levels of military spending in the United States, as well as Britain and France, contribute to global economic imbalances and divert science and technology, so that those countries which spend most on military research and development are the least competitive in international trade. The successful capitalist economies are those which have spent least on armaments and which have responded to demands for spending on education and the environment, or which have introduced local community development programmes or worker participation schemes. Indeed the economic problems of the 1970s can be explained by a new disjuncture between production and consumption and economics and politics—a disjuncture between the new pattern of industrial development centred on Japan and West Europe, and Fordist political institutions dominated by the United States.

### New Challenges

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Cold War compromise has come under challenge from both right and left. The neo-liberal Right challenged the Fabian elements of the compromise. It criticized the role of big government and welfare, of trades unions, and inflation. It retained the emphasis on Cold War policies and the Soviet threat, but advocated a return to the market, the abandonment of planning and state intervention, the eradication of 'socialism'. On the left, the post-1968 new social movements put more emphasis on the Cold War element of the compromise. They were critical of the paternalist and militarist nature of state intervention, not of state intervention *per se*. They favoured democratization rather than liberalization and privatization.<sup>7</sup>

The new Cold War of the early 1980s was a victory for the neo-liberal Right. It helped to curb, at least temporarily, the influence of the post-1968 Left in Western Europe. It provided a reason for tolerating a growing US deficit and thus renewing, at least temporarily, American economic vigour. But is the end of the Cold War a victory for the neo-liberal Right? Does it not imply big reductions in military spending and a shift in political power to West Germany and Japan? And, in the absence of a Soviet threat, is it possible to explain away the neglect of welfare or the environment?

I have tried to suggest that the Cold War was not a conflict of systems. There were two distinct social systems, one called 'socialism' and the

<sup>6</sup> See Robin Murray, 'Life After Henry (Ford)', *Marxism Today*, October 1988 and 'Benetton Britain: The New Economic Order', *Marxism Today*, November 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Hilary Wainwright, 'The State and Society: Reflections on a Western Experience', *The New Democrats*, op. cit.



other called 'capitalism'. They were specific variants of socialism and capitalism, but they became archetypal because all other variants were excluded. These two systems, which I call Atlanticism and post-Stalinism, were not in conflict but were *complementary*, tied together by the same historical experience. Both needed the other. Both required high levels of military spending and a permanent external threat. The existence of each provided a legitimation for the other.

Both systems, for different reasons, are in crisis. Atlanticism was the social and political expression of the Fordist era of capitalist development which is now exhausted. Crisis may be too strong a word for the West; both because of democratic pressure and because of the lessons learned in the 1930s, it is perhaps more accurate to talk about the problems associated with the erosion of Atlanticism. Post-Stalinism has never functioned effectively in East-Central Europe; it has experienced a long suppressed crisis which exploded dramatically as the lid was lifted from the mounting failure. In both East and West, the Cold War is ending for primarily internal reasons.

Insofar as the West did play a role in the revolutions of 1989, it was not the neo-liberal Right but the new social movements, and especially the peace movements, which hastened the collapse of actually existing socialism. It was the fact that parts of the peace movement broke with the left tradition of regarding the conflict as a conflict between capitalism and socialism in which the West was primarily responsible that undermined the words and the language of the Cold War.

The neo-liberal Right legitimized its belief in deregulation and privatization in terms of a contrast with 'socialism' that existed in the West under Labour and Social Democrat governments and was identified with actually existing socialism in the East. Hence the coming to power of Reagan and Thatcher was associated with a renewal of Cold War rhetoric, increased emphasis on nuclear weapons, and higher levels of military spending. The New Cold War of the 1980s *legitimized* the renewed autarky of East European countries as a response to the debt crisis. It can be argued that the New Cold War helped to justify an interruption in the evolutionary process towards political reform that seemed to be occurring in the late 1970s.<sup>8</sup> It was, after all, in December 1981 that the crackdown in Poland took place in the midst of Warsaw Pact military manoeuvres on Poland's borders. E.P. Thompson wrote in 1981 that the future of Europe hangs on two hinges: whether we can halt cruise missiles in the West and whether solidarity can succeed in the East.<sup>9</sup> In a double motion, these processes were stopped for a while. When the cruise missiles were finally deployed in 1983, there was a severe backlash against those who had opposed the Soviet missiles in East Germany and also in Hungary.

The effectiveness of the new Cold War was severely weakened by the emergence of a mass peace movement in Western Europe in the early

<sup>8</sup> See Adam Michnik's article 'A New Evolutionism' written in 1978, in *Letters From Prison and Other Essays*, University of California Press, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> *Beyond Cold War*.

1980s. It is worth recalling that the movements were comparable in scale to the democracy movements in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. Five million people demonstrated in the capitals of Western Europe in the autumn of 1981 and again in the autumn of 1983. What made this different from earlier peace movements was the explicit link between peace and human rights, the emphasis on the Cold War as a 'joint venture', which was expressed in the END Appeal of April 1980 and E.P. Thompson's essay on exterminism.<sup>20</sup> This helped to legitimize the peace movement in the West, to show that there was genuine concern about nuclear weapons and that this was not orchestrated by Moscow. But it also helped to provide space for the emergence of new social movements in the East. From 1983 onwards, parts of the Western peace movement like END, or, the Dutch Inter-Church Peace Council (IKV) and the West German Greens, began to focus their activities on 'detente from below', on building links with peace, green and human rights groups in the East and in pressing upon official peace committees and Warsaw Pact governments the argument that their initiatives for disarmament could not be taken seriously if they did not permit the right to campaign freely for peace.

### Solidarity and Democracy in Eastern Europe

In the 1980s, the individual isolated dissident gave way to social movements as a new form of opposition in East-Central Europe. By far the most important was Solidarity. It can be argued that the peace movement represented a new phenomenon in the West because of its insistence on democracy in both East and West, because it challenged the notion that Western governments were the guardians of freedom and the Soviet government stood for peace. For its part, Solidarity also undermined Cold War ideology because it was a workers' movement in a society in which the rulers claimed to represent the working class, the struggle for socialism against capitalism. Subsequently, other movements, clubs and initiatives emerged in East-Central Europe. Peace movements were especially important—Swords into Ploughshares (a mass church-based peace movement) in the GDR and the Hungarian Dialogue Group in the early 1980s, and substantial peace movements in Poland (Freedom and Peace), Czechoslovakia (the Independent Peace Association or NMS) and Slovenia in the late 1980s. The convergence of ideas that developed through the process of detente from below did profoundly influence 'New Thinking' in the Soviet Union, as can be observed from Gorbachev's speeches, and insistent pressure on Eastern governments did increase the political space within which the new movements could operate.

Where did the democracy movements of 1989 come from? They represented an outburst of popular feelings, but these feelings were articulated and organized by those who had gained experience in the new peace, green and human rights movements of the 1980s. Both Vaclav Havel and Jiří Dienstbier (the new Czech foreign minister) had been engaged in intensive dialogue with END and IKV during the 1980s. Dienstbier is a signatory of the END Appeal and a contributor

<sup>20</sup> See *Exterminism and the New Cold War*, Verso, London 1982.

to the END Journal—one of the people we would telephone regularly for tactical advice. Ulrike Poppe (Democracy Now) and Baerbel Bohley (New Forum) were part of East German women's groups who collaborated closely with the END Women's Committee. The END German-German group organized Baerbel's six-month stay in Britain last year after she was expelled temporarily as a result of the officially organized demonstration to commemorate Rosa Luxemburg, in which demonstrators displayed posters carrying a quotation from Rosa Luxemburg: 'Freedom is the freedom to think differently.' Over the last two years, much of END's energy has been devoted to supporting the rights of independent Czech peace activists; now these same peace activists are playing a key role in Civic Forum. And in Hungary, the Young Democrats (FIDESZ), who participated in the Round Table talks with the Government about Hungary's future and who are now contesting the elections (and even got to meet President Bush), were formed by a group of students who had initially got together to organize and engage in an East-West dialogue with groups like END and IKV. And the list could go on.

### Where Now?

But if it was not a victory for the West, in the sense that Western policies contributed to the collapse of socialism as it actually existed, is it a victory in the sense that East European countries will adopt a Western model? That is still an open question.

There are many alternative futures for Europe, but it is useful to distinguish two broad directions. One notion, which is propounded by the neo-liberal Right and dominates public rhetoric at present, is that democracy is necessarily linked to unrestrained markets and that only capitalist 'shock therapy' will enable Eastern Europe to acquire the consumer goods which so attract their populations. Economic assistance from the West has to be based on strictly commercial criteria. In this scenario, East-Central Europe is somehow annexed to the West or becomes a dependent territory. It is worth noting that, in the West, the neo-liberal Right is very reluctant to reduce military spending. It is argued that NATO must be maintained because it is the main instrument of stability in Europe today. Hence what one can envisage is a kind of Americanization of Europe, with high levels of military spending, high levels of private consumption, a kind of unifying materialist culture, and pockets of poverty especially in the European periphery—the East, the South and the West (i.e. Britain and Ireland).

There are two major (but not insurmountable) difficulties with this scenario. First, who will Europe arm against? Who will be the new 'other' to legitimize military spending and poverty? One answer is Russia—a Russia which retreats not necessarily to a pre-Gorbachevian system but to an undemocratic, chaotic, unstable politics, riven with economic and ethnic problems. Another answer, which is already provided by the Pentagon and by the French and British defence ministries, is the 'fanaticist' drug traffickers, and terrorists of the third world. It is possible to envisage a new Cold War

between the 'modern' North and the 'fundamentalist' South. All the same, are nuclear weapons, tanks and aircraft appropriate to confront the 'fanaticists'?

A second difficulty is social justice. Despite the angry outbursts against anything connected with socialism, egalitarianism has taken root in East-Central Europe—witness the shock of East Germans when the extravagance of their leaders was revealed. We, in the West, are much more tolerant about Reagan's ranches, the Queen's castles, the ridiculous arguments about country houses among our cabinet ministers. If the East-Central Europeans ~~do~~ succeed in democratizing their countries, will people accept inequality, inflation and unemployment?

The second direction, proposed by the new social movements, emphasizes their concerns about peace, the environment, gender, multiculturalism, and democracy. This would involve a more equal relationship between East and West Europe in which there was change in the West as well as the East. There would be big reductions in military spending and big increases in expenditure on welfare and the environment and substantial increases in economic assistance from surplus countries like West Germany and Japan to Eastern Europe and the third world on a continuing basis. Moreover, this assistance would be based not on commercial grounds but on social and ecological criteria determined through a democratic process involving both donors and recipients. This would be achieved through the democratization of new and existing trans-European institutions. This approach is reflected in certain new initiatives in Europe today like the Czech-sponsored Helsinki Citizens Assembly, which will be held in Prague in October 1990.

The difference in the two approaches is encapsulated by the current German debate. Everyone now agrees that unification is inevitable. It is already taking place at the level of society. But on whose terms? Is it to be a confederal, demilitarized Germany or is West Germany to annex the East? The Soviet Union says that a united Germany has to be neutral. Kohl says that West Germany will never leave NATO. And what sort of economic assistance will West Germany provide? At present, economic assistance is in abeyance, despite East Germany's desperate need, until the appropriate market reforms have been introduced.

At the time of writing, the first direction is winning the battle of words. The 1990s may well go down in history as the moment when Europe (and the world) took the wrong direction because of a commitment to capitalist orthodoxy. The dreaded word 'socialism' is no longer printable.

In an essay addressed to the END Convention in Amsterdam in 1985, entitled 'The Anatomy of Reticence', Vaclav Havel tried to explain to Western peace activists why the word 'peace' had been so discredited in Soviet-type societies and why, therefore, those who opposed the system were so reluctant to enter a dialogue with the Western peace

movement.<sup>21</sup> In a recent acceptance speech written for a German peace prize, Havel now says that 'one important word (peace) has been rescued from total debasement'.<sup>22</sup> He says: 'In spite of that lengthy process of systematically divesting the word "peace" of all meaning—worse than that, investing it instead with quite the opposite meaning to that given in the dictionary—a number of Don Quixotes in Charter 77 and several of their younger colleagues in the Independent Peace Association have managed to rehabilitate the word and restore its original meaning.... And it is not just a question of saving a word.... Something far more important is saved.'

So can the word 'socialism' be restored? I think it is difficult. 'Socialism' is discredited not just because of the inner contradictions of actually existing socialism. It is also because the Left failed to oppose actively what was happening in the Soviet Union and East-Central Europe. It was the peace movement that championed the cause of human rights. Social Democrat and Labour Parties promoted detente from above, good relations between ruling parties, which was important, but they argued wrongly that this was incompatible with detente from below. They argued that peace came before human rights. Likewise, much of the Left was reluctant to put its energies into democratic struggles in the East, in part because these countries were viewed as 'socialist', however distorted.

And there is something in the argument. Socialism is not such a straightforward word as peace. It does contain the notion of a strategy for social justice, a method of social organization that replaces capitalism. Because socialists failed to address the problem of state power, the portrayal of statist forms of economic organization as 'socialist' does have some truth. And yet, the absence of an appropriate word with which to pursue the goals of material equality and economic democracy, the absence of a framework within which to discuss problems of ownership and control, uneven development and social policy leaves a vacuum. These concerns will become ever more important in the coming years and we need to be able to conceptualize and articulate them. Moreover, if actually existing socialism has left a negative legacy, it is important to recall the proud and honourable socialist tradition in Europe—of workers' movements, ideas and education—that must not be discarded. Is social justice an adequate substitute for the term 'socialist'? Do we have to begin the painful and isolating task of redefining and resuscitating socialism? Or should we attempt to develop a new term that encompasses new concerns about democracy, the environment, gender and race, as well as traditional concerns? This is the debate we have to conduct with our new friends in the East.

<sup>21</sup> See *END Journal*, Issue 16/17, Summer 1985.

<sup>22</sup> 'Words on Words', *New York Review of Books*, 18 January 1990.

# Marx + Engels



## Collected Works

Volumes available: 1-25, 28-31, 38-43

'This series still represents at least twice the value for money of any comparable product on offer elsewhere. Not only does it maintain a consistently good standard of production, it is beautifully indexed and presented. Unbelievably, the price of these treasures, which are truly beyond compare, remains fixed at £15 a time.' Ken Coates, *Tribune*

'The invaluable Marx-Engels *Collected Works*, whose publication proceeds majestically, is of unusual interest. As always, the extremely good indexing makes this edition of Marx easier to refer to than any other. It is unlikely that this edition of *Collected Works* will ever need to be replaced.' Eric Hobsbawm, *New Society*

Volume 26 (forthcoming) covers work by Engels after Marx's death (1883-89), including *The Origin of the Family*, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, a chronology of the Chartist movement, Notes on a Journey to America, and more.

**Hardback £15**  
ISBN 0 85315 447 3

## Capital

A Critique of Political Economy

### Volume 1: Capitalist Production

Extent 767pp Hardback £7 95 ISBN 0 85315 210 1

### Volume 2: The Process of Circulation of Capital

Extent 551pp Hardback £7 95 ISBN 0 85315 027 3

### Volume 3: Capitalist Production as a Whole

Extent 948pp Hardback £7 95 ISBN 0 85315 028 1

For further details of the **Collected Works** and other Lawrence & Wishart publications, please contact:

Publicity Department, L&W  
144a Old South Lambeth Road  
London SW8 1XX  
Tel (01/071) 820 9281 Fax (01/071) 587 0460



LAWRENCE & WISHART

# OXFORD • UNIVERSITY • PRESS



Oxford congratulates the *New Left Review* on its thirtieth anniversary

## **Freedom Under Thatcher**

Civil Liberties in Modern Britain

**KEITH D. EWING and  
CONOR A. GEARTY**

This searching and robust examination reveals the full impact of Thatcherism on political liberty, and offers a foretaste of changes likely to take place during the 1990s.

0 19 825413 X, 304 pages £22.50  
0 19 825414 8, Oxford Paperbacks £5.95  
April 1990

## **Market, State, and Community**

Theoretical Foundations of  
Market Socialism

**DAVID MILLER**

In this work, David Miller, a leading political theorist, provides a clear and coherent statement of the theoretical basis of market socialism and justifies it as a viable political option.

0 19 827340 1, 370 pages, £32.50  
Clarendon Press

## **Market Socialism**

Edited by **JULIAN LE GRAND and SAUL ESTRIN**

*'This is a serious book and not just an apologia for Labour's policy review. It needs serious examination by the Left.'* Meghnad Desai, Tribune

*'It is highly stimulating, both for the theoretical issues it raises and for the way it proceeds from these to practical conclusions.'* Charles Seaford, New Statesman and Society

0 19 827701 6, 230 pages, Clarendon Press £25.00  
0 19 827700 8, paper covers £9.95

*For more information please contact Jane de Gay, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP*

## *new left review*

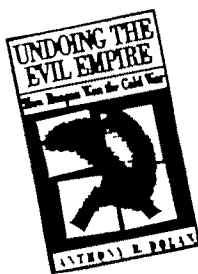
### *Why Not Subscribe to NLR Today?*

The advantages of subscribing:

1. We send you FREE a back issue of your choice plus any other back issues at a reduced rate (see inside back cover for details).
2. At current subscription rates (see inside front cover) you receive six issues annually for less than the price of five bought individually.
3. You can buy any number of Verso books at 20% discount from our book club, NLRE.
4. You make sure that you don't miss an issue.

Write to our subscriptions department today with your full name, address and postcode/zipcode, indicating the issue with which your subscription is to begin and your choice of free back issue. Enclose either cheque made payable to

*New Left Review* or credit card type, number and expiry date  
(Visa, Access, Mastercard, Eurocard, AmEx accepted).



## UNDOING THE EVIL EMPIRE How Reagan Won The Cold War Anthony R. Dolan

The words, policies, and persona of Ronald Reagan brought about the collapse of the cold war, according to this Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, who held the title of Reagan's chief speechwriter for both terms and was associated with his most celebrated speeches including the "evil empire" speech and his "crusade for freedom" address to the British parliament. Among the turning points in the Cold War were Reagan's public statements, which weakened the Soviet will, discouraged expansionism, and created a moral force that led to the crisis of communism. A powerful and controversial study. Summer 1990 350 pages 0-8447-3705-4 £19.50

## THE TWILIGHT STRUGGLE The Soviet Union v. The United States Today Constantine C. Menges

Despite glasnost and other positive steps, the Soviet Union continues to try to spread communism around the globe. A new historical phenomenon, armed anti-Communist movements like UNITA in Angola, challenge the basic belief of Marxism-Leninism - that the Communist world revolution will triumph. To stop these movements, the USSR uses diplomacy and propaganda as well as force to isolate them from the free world. This book offers the most thorough account of these struggles. Summer 1990 320 pages 0-8447-3701-1 £19.50



AEI PRESS is distributed by the University Press of America

For further information, please contact, University Press of America,

3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, LONDON WC2E 8LU

Tel 01 240 0856/Fax 01 379 0609

# Collets International

management and staff greet

*new left review*

on its 30th anniversary

*We know we have  
contributed to your success!*

always available at Collets

Come to our refurbished shop for the most impressive  
stock of left books and journals.  
**And a great deal more besides.**

129-131 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EQ.

# Collets International

Bookshop

Bookshop



## *A Culture in Contraflow—I*

Few subjects can be so elusive as a national culture. The term lends itself to any number of meanings, each presenting its own difficulties of definition or application. Towards the end of the sixties, I tried to explore what seemed one significant structure to fall under such a heading in Britain—the dominant pattern of social thought, as displayed in a range of intellectual disciplines.<sup>1</sup> The product of this attempt had many failings. Written at a time of rebellion, in a spirit of *outrance*, it mounted a peremptory broadside on its chosen target. The price of this general excoriation was paid in a variety of local simplifications or misjudgements. Overstatement in critique was also accompanied by over-confidence of cure—a theoretical triumphalism that was no service to the radical alternatives advocated. These shortcomings aside, however, there was also a broader problem of method. For the procedure of the essay was open to two opposite, yet in some ways equally cogent, objections. From one standpoint, how could such a wide diversity of learned pursuits—roughly, the different humanities and social sciences—

be responsibly brought into a single focus? From another, why give such attention anyway to a set of narrow academic specialisms, rather than to major popular manifestations of the national culture? The moment of 1968 explains why it was possible to be at once so selective and so sweeping. The choice of ground was a natural expression of campus ferment; as was the *coup de main* that could scoop its landmarks together into a systematically inter-related set of obstructions.

The exemplary antidote to any too intellectualist approach to our national culture—a work that probes the first as much as the second of these terms—is now to be found in Tom Nairn's tremendous study of the place of the British monarchy in official and popular sensibility.<sup>2</sup> No more compelling portrait of the construction of a certain profane *Volksgeist* has ever been written. But as this enquiry into an English Ideology itself makes clear, an effective hegemony is exercised in a variety of modes (whose relationship is often one of compensation rather than congruence), and at many different levels. Hence even a crude sketch of its arcaner reaches could serve a common end. Today, as it happens, there is good reason to look again at the intellectual region scanned twenty years ago, from something like the same vantage-point. For a large change has come over it. Then, the academic institutions of the country were the objects of a student revolt, from below. Now they are the targets of government hostility and intimidation, from above—a campaign of harassment described (in private) by a Ministerial spokesman with brutal candour as 'a *Kulturkampf* against British universities'. Once pilloried from the Left, the world of higher education has become a bugbear of the Right. What has happened in the intervening decades to bring about this change of fronts?

## 1. Political Changes

The predominant outlook of the English intelligentsia in the post-war settlement, once the Cold War set in, was parochial and quietist: adhering to the established political consensus without exercising itself greedily to construct or defend it. 'Cultivated but distrustful of ideas, socially responsible but suspicious of politics', Francis Mulhern has noted, its members were 'decidedly Anglican in temper: aware of higher things but careful not to become tedious on that account, and not really in much doubt of the basic good sense of the nation and those who governed it.'<sup>3</sup> Such peaceable conformism lasted down to the first Wilson years, supplying much of the sere backcloth against which campus revolt finally exploded in the late sixties. This was the cultural formation on which rebellious sights were trained in the movement of 1968.

The active unrest of those years was suppressed, or subsided, fairly quickly. But it altered the intellectual climate in the country durably. For the first time there emerged in Britain a stratum of radicalized

<sup>1</sup> 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review* 50, July–August 1968.

<sup>2</sup> *The Enchanted Glass*, London 1988; which points out, with justice, how large are the dimensions missing from the analysis I attempted: pp. 274–75.

<sup>3</sup> 'Introduction: Preliminaries and Two Contrasts', to Régis Debray, *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities—The Intellectuals of Modern France*, London 1981, p. xix.

graduates of a certain numerical mass—one which did not peter out, but was reinforced under the impact of the industrial battles of the early seventies. This provided the ambience in which a militant culture well to the left of the previous spectrum could take wider shape. The strength of the new area derived not merely from those marked by the break itself, but even more from the accumulation of ideas and forces which the space it created henceforward made possible. A superimposition of generations now combined to create a public sphere unlike any other since the Second World War—one whose dominant temper was pervasively, if never rigidly or exclusively, Marxist, and whose influence stretched from slowly increasing positions in colleges and universities and an intermittent presence in the national media, through a numerous undergrowth of its own periodicals and associations, across to allied strands in the performing arts and metropolitan counter-culture. The growth in size and significance of this sphere reflected in part the transformation of higher education itself. A student population of about 100,000 in 1960 had doubled to 200,000 by 1967–68, and had nearly trebled again by 1988, to some 580,000—half of them by now in polytechnics. This sociological expansion of the basis for a British intelligentsia coincided with institutional changes that gave more outlets for radical intervention: among them the advent of the Open University, and the relocation of the *Guardian*; the rise of listings journalism, and the success of Channel Four. But the real foundation of the new sector lay in the interplay between three or four generations of socialist intellectuals, in such conditions.

The most important of these was, of course, the remarkable levy of the late 30's—nearly all active when young in the Communist Party, and most of them members of its Historians' Group after the war. Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, John Saville, Victor Kiernan, Gwyn Williams, Rodney Hilton, Raymond Williams were each leading figures in their own fields by the mid sixties. Their collective influence, however, acquired a different weight over the next two decades—one due not simply to their intellectual gifts, outstandingly endowed though this generation was, but also to the blend of political steadfastness and moral independence that made them distinctive among their European counterparts. The productivity of this cohort continued unabated, yielding such major new oeuvres in the eighties as that of Geoffrey de Ste. Croix. It was followed by those whose formative experience lay in the late 50's—another period of establishment torpor and burgeoning protest against it. The New Left was the home of most of this generation, which lacked the organizational tradition of its predecessors, but was linked to the principal mass movement of the time, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. When CND peaked, much of it suffered dispersal and withdrawal. But after the upheaval of the late 60's, it recovered a strong presence in the subsequent political climate. The careers of Stuart Hall or Raphael Samuel have been emblematic in this regard; somewhat apart in origin and evolution, the work of Tom Nairn rejoined company with them here. The linkage provided by this intermediate cluster of socialists, in their different ways, was vital for the consolidation of a mutually communicating Left.

The turmoil of the late 60's and early 70's threw up in turn its own political generation, whose characteristic form of expression became the critical journal, generally produced on the edges of the academy and against it. The formidable success of *Past and Present*, created by the Communist historians in the early 50's, did not serve as a model for these reviews, whose stance was more oppositional. Their number multiplied steadily over the decade, till they eventually covered virtually the whole range of social disciplines: philosophy, history, economics, sociology, anthropology, literature, among others.<sup>4</sup> Small and specialized, they coexisted with a buoyant press of counter-cultural leisure born from the same moment, enjoying wide readership in the capital. Expressive of this generation, whose rise in departments and media institutions was fairly rapid, has been the vivid career of its most fertile writer, Terry Eagleton. Finally, overlapping from the late 70's onwards, there emerged feminism—which, unlike its counterpart in the USA, was always predominantly a movement of the Left in Britain. In the neo-conservative 80's, its persistent dynamic helped to ensure that a radical public sphere did not lose ground even in a time of deepening political reaction.

### The Test of Thatcherism

For the arrival of the Thatcher regime, in effect, did not undo these cultural gains. Put to the test, the critical zone not only resisted but grew. Although the Conservative ascendancy soon transmitted a whole series of tensions through the Left, as Labour cracked and subsided, these stimulated rather than depressed theoretical debate and exploration. The liveliest vehicle of response to the new order became the reconverted *Marxism Today*, the mascot of the period, which owed much of its success precisely to its particular generational synergy—symbolized by its four key-note thinkers: Eric Hobsbawm, Stuart Hall, Martin Jacques and Beatrice Campbell. The controversies set off by the analyses and proposals of such writers as these, and the various alternatives or rejoinders to them, typically involving the same mixture of generations—say, Raymond Williams, Raphael Samuel, Anthony Barnett or Hilary Wainwright—were often intense enough. But whatever the strains imposed by political adversity in these years, with its train of muffled frictions or misfired arguments, basic solidarity on the intellectual Left was rarely breached; and out of the trial emerged the liveliest republic of letters in European socialism. What other country in the 80's generated a polemical library to rival *Iron Britannia*, *Zero Option*, *Towards 2000*, *The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited*, *For a Socialist Pluralism*, *The Enchanted Glass*, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, *Politics for a Rational Left*, *Theatres of Memory*? Much, although not all, of this literature was produced for an audience of the committed Left. But it was a characteristic of the new situation that its major voices were heard more widely. The two

<sup>4</sup> Among these journals, and their dates of inception, were: *Screen* (1969), *Radical Philosophy* (1970), *Economy and Society* (1972), *Critique* (1973), *Oxford Literary Review* (1974), *Critique of Anthropology* (1974), *History Workshop* (1976), *Social History* (1976), *Capital and Class* (1977), *Cambridge Journal of Economics* (1977), *Feminist Review* (1979), *Theory, Culture and Society* (1982).

commanding cases were Edward Thompson's campaign for European nuclear disarmament and Eric Hobsbawm's call for a reconstruction of the British labour movement: each sustained appeals, from very broad platforms, of national resonance.

The appearance of a radical band—para, plain or post Marxist—at one end of the intellectual spectrum was in due course matched by the emergence of an ultra sector at the other. Here the decisive experience was the traumatic defeat of the Heath government by the miners' strikes. From the mid-seventies onwards a hard and effective Right broke away from the conventional post-war wisdoms, creating its own network of influence, whose strengths bore no symmetry to those of the Left.<sup>3</sup> The original core of this formation lay in a cluster of high-voltage policy institutes, well funded by business and devoted to uncompromising market principles: the Adam Smith Institute, the Centre for Policy Studies, Aims for Industry. It then acquired a spirited corps of younger publicists, many trained on the *Telegraph*, flanked by a somewhat older group of converted ornaments of the previous consensus. The skills of this amalgam made the *Spectator* the most polished weekly of the decade, its circulation overtaking that of a floundering *New Statesman*, for most of this period a casualty of the demise of Fabianism. On its farther side, a more abstruse coterie of High Tory theorists extolled the organic virtues of church or state, rather than the atomic principles of consumer sovereignty and the market, in the *Salisbury Review*. Limited in size, the new Right made up in leverage. Various locked into the backlands of company finance, the counsels of the Conservative leadership, and the service of the press tycoons—the worlds of Joris Ivens and Digby Anderson, Ferdinand Mount and Hugh Thomas, John Vincent and Roger Scruton—its contribution to the ideological momentum of the Thatcher regime was considerable.

But the political prominence of this sector was never proportionate to its more strictly intellectual impact. Not large in numbers, it depended for much of its sound on the amplifiers to which it was wired. For a brief moment, in the early 80's, it looked as if it might capture the traditional gazette of mainstream intellectual life, when the *Times Literary Supplement* swerved rightwards with a series of tirades against the evils of Marxism and its exponents—historical, political or philosophical. But this prospect soon faded, temporary editorial whim being no substitute for real collective dispositions. The new Right had always been relatively weak in the academy, and lacked the cadres to impose its vision at large. The great bulk of the British intellectual establishment held fast to its moderate liberal verities, indifferent or hostile to creeds of either Left or Right. The deep structures of its inherited outlook remained largely unshaken through all the zig-zags of British politics in these years. But whereas in the first half of the period these had appeared to be under threat from student power and trade-union militancy, arousing a general reactionary alarm, in the second half it was a vindictive government, squeezing budgets and slicing departments, which put them under severe pressure.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Maurice Cowling, 'The Origins of the New Right', *Encounter*, November 1989.

## A Shifting Centre

The result was an unmistakable radicalization of Centre opinion, within its traditional parameters. By the time of Thatcher's third electoral victory, academic dislike of the regime was so widespread that the level of Conservative support had fallen to less than a fifth of the lecturing body, and despondency at the state of higher education was so acute that nearly two-thirds had contemplated quitting it.<sup>6</sup> The oppositional sympathies of this stratum, overwhelmingly with the Alliance a few years earlier, were by then equally divided between it and Labour, as the latter moved towards normalcy again. Viewed over two decades, the principal change was that the major contingent of British intellectuals now felt not so much, perhaps, disaffected as disestablished. A conventional culture of the Centre had been dislodged from its familiar habitat. The most significant sign of this shift was probably less the decline in Conservative affiliation than a weakening of automatic allegiance to constitutional tradition. The rise of the Alliance, in most other ways distilling the received wisdom of the past, in this respect marked a break with it. Once electoral reform was put on the agenda, some at least of the structures of the British State were for the first time since the War exposed to question.

A good barometer of these alterations was the periodical founded within a few weeks of Thatcher's arrival in power in 1979, the *London Review of Books*. Editorially, its initial stance reflected the typical concerns and fears of the median intelligentsia after its buffeting between the Campus Revolt and the Winter of Discontent: reasserting the traditional priorities of literature and democracy, against such dangers to them as the 'shameful politicising and destruction of the literary content of the *New Statesman*' and deceitful 'hostility to parliamentary government' disguised in the name of democratizing the Labour Party.<sup>7</sup> The creation of the SDP a year later, and its early success, were welcomed by the paper, whose pages regularly hosted its leading figures. But by 1985, while still warning of 'violence and conspiracy' countenanced by sections of the Left, and approving the defeat of the miners' strike, the LRB had cooled towards the new party—in whose leader it had no confidence and whose doctrine of the social market economy it found vacuous.<sup>8</sup> Thereafter it increasingly concentrated its fire on the right, in what became over time a savage opposition to Thatcher's rule, generating some of the most ferocious and iconoclastic writing of the decade. For these grenade-attacks on the regime, the journal now often drew on both mainstream and Marxist writers of the Left: Paul Foot and Victor Kiernan alongside R.W. Johnson and Tam Dalyell.

The period 1986–1988 thus saw a set of gradual changes in the historic physiognomy of the British intelligentsia. An original Marxist culture of the Left gained ground, against a background of campus unrest

<sup>6</sup> See the MORI poll in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* of 5 June 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Miller, LRB, 25 October 1979; 'Preface', in M. Mason, ed., *London Review of Books, Anthology One*, London 1981, p. ix.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Miller, 'Introduction', Nicholas Spice, ed., *London Reviews*, London 1985, pp. 5–6.

and industrial militancy; a combative culture of the Right, interbreeding Chicago and Hatton, emerged to inform a government determined to wipe the slate clean of them; and the traditional culture of the Centre, still far the most extensive in influence, was ruffled into an unaccustomed fronde by the outcome. The net balance of these shifts was a movement running contrary to the course taken by the state: the political and intellectual worlds went in opposite directions. That happened during the 80's in France too. But there the long-delayed arrival of social-democratic government coincided with the newly minted dominance of a local neo-conservative ideology. Here a regime of the radical right part confronted, part created an overall cultural drift to the left. Prompted by social resentment and doctrinal animus, its attempt at a *Gleichschaltung* of the academy tended to raise up the very adversaries it sought to stamp out, even as its drive to impose the values of the counting-house and constabulary on society swept forward elsewhere. While an authoritarian populism was redrawing the electoral contours of the country to the advantage of capital, in this domain the hegemonic legacy weakened.

## 2. Boundary Changes

A second, perhaps deeper, transformation occurred in these years. Twenty years ago it was possible to take the nation—actually, the meta-national state making up the United Kingdom—as an unproblematic unit for cultural enquiry. There was a general and a specific reason for that. The economies of the West were still relatively self-contained entities across the major branches of industrial production, nowhere more so than in the publishing and broadcasting sectors; while their educational systems had few points of interchange. Particular intellectual patterns do not, however, depend only on such institutional infrastructures. They are formed by political history and social tradition. Within the set of major Western societies, Britain in the immediate post-war decades possessed a peculiarly stable and insulated culture. Alone of them it had never known either social upheaval, foreign occupation or mass immigration—the three great solvents of fixed collective identity in the twentieth century; while unlike the few smaller European countries which had also escaped these, it had been the world's premier empire for two centuries, with all the confidence of superiority imparted by global power. These were circumstances which made British intellectual life exceptionally well defined. Even the admixture of conservative refugees who achieved post-war salience essentially confirmed rather than contested its standing dispositions. The national stamp of the prevailing outlook was one of its own proudest themes. In these conditions the frontiers of the spirit were indeed largely one with the borders of the state.

The ferment of 1968 thus represented not only a political break; in consciously forming part of an international chain of revolts, it marked a geo-cultural one too—of no less moment. This was the first time since the war that a significant movement within British society was directly synchronized to counterparts outside the country. The role of television in making the connexions possible was much

commented upon at the time. The next two decades were to see a vast amplification of the material changes these events portended. Internationalization of the forces of production accelerated rapidly throughout the capitalist world, bypassing and diminishing the nation state. Global corporations, outsourcing their manufacturing sites, were followed by offshore credit systems and interpenetrating financial markets. Travel became a huge industry in its own right, tourism intercontinental. Similar developments in due course found spectacular expression in the fields of publishing and broadcasting themselves, with the media empires of Bertelsmann, Murdoch, Elsevier, Berlusconi, Maxwell or Hachette. In this epoch, no culture could remain national in the pristiner senses of the past.

These processes affected the whole OECD zone. Arguably, however, Britain underwent the greatest transformation in this respect. Only recently the most self-contained of the larger NATO cultures, it was now to become in some ways the least closed to the surrounding world. The terms of this change were basically set by its peculiar crossroads position: geographically part of Europe and linguistically tied to America. By the late 80's there was probably no other country where influences from both sides of the Atlantic intermingled so freely. This inrush was not simply a matter of natural-historical location, and its two currents were not equivalent in character. Political shifts, indicated above, were necessary to convert a combination of general economic forces and particular geo-cultural emplacement into specific intellectual results. The emergence of a substantial culture of the Left after 1968 was the key which principally unlocked the gates to Europe. A wide absorption of the corpus of continental Marxism was the main initial consequence: a decade later, it was easier for a student to gain exposure to its full range in England than in France or Germany, where translations were fewer. Structuralism, less affiliated in origin, was received in an overlapping intellectual milieu through the 70's. Hermeneutics and post-structuralism followed in the 80's, entering through more diffuse channels, but by and large still issuing into a public sphere whose sympathies were with socialism and now feminism. Publishing houses of the Left, NLB in the first phase and Polity in the second, were the most concentrated transmission points for this process of assimilation. But in its later stages it extended into the area of the liberal centre, as membership of the European Community became normalized. A period which began with Althusser and Gramsci, Adorno and Lacan pioneered by journals like this one, ended with Habermas and Bourdieu starring in a chastened TLS, and Derrida or Foucault admired by an LRB recanting its suspicion of deconstruction.

### The Atlantic Dimension

If the European influx was in the main a deliberate work of left and centre-left impulses in Britain, the American osmosis was by contrast partly an unintended consequence of the rise of the Right, although it was always a more mixed and multifaceted process. Common language and legal traditions had traditionally bound the two



countries together, although in many fields the US had often enjoyed a more diverse intellectual life because of its composite immigrant background. In the fifties, Washington's imperial interest in securing London as a junior partner and staging-post led its espionage service to create *Encounter* as a conduit for the Cold War ideology of the time in the UK. Effective enough in this political role, until its cover was blown by CIA boasts in the mid sixties, the journal was more limited as a vehicle for familiarization with American culture; its format was actually more oriented to Europe, as the endangered front-line of the Cold War, than to the safe rearguard of the US. More generally, Anglo-American intellectual relations still remained uneven, often distant. In the 70's this changed. For the first time, central social disciplines became dominated by US developments. Outstanding cases in point were analytical philosophy, political theory and neo-classical economics, in each of which there was a certain traditional basis for Anglo-Saxon congruence. Although the new English Right could and did appropriate trends within these for its own purposes, naturalizing Friedman, Nozick or Buchanan, this was not the general pattern. The culture of the Centre filtered the distribution of influences, in which Rawls, Arrow or Chomsky loomed larger. In other areas American reception of European ideas predated or exceeded British, US adaptations then becoming a significant local reference in their own right, as in the Yale school of literary criticism; or formed distinctive hybrids like an existentialized neo-pragmatism. Overall, the American intelligentsia had followed a trajectory not unlike that of the British in these years—a radical breakthrough after the late sixties, a neo-conservative counter-thrust from the late seventies, with a continuing centre-liberal majority throughout. The two principal differences were the far weaker Marxist strain on the left—McCarthyism having ensured that there was no equivalent of the British Communist historians; and the more externally coloured alterations of mood in the liberal mainstream, troubled by visions of Soviet gain or US loss abroad rather than fears of trade-union militancy at home, before turning against Reagan's domestic programme in much the same way as its British counterpart did against Thatcher's. There was little potential here for comprehensive reinforcement of the radical Right in England, anyway scarcely warmed by the Presidential deficits.

In itself, of course, the general growth of the transatlantic presence within British intellectual life reflected the changing material balance between the two societies. The far greater resources and responsibilities of the hegemonic power were in due course bound to have their cultural effects. The rise of the *New York Review of Books*, from its beginnings in 1967, to become the peak literary-political periodical in the English-speaking world, with a circulation some four times that of its UK counterparts combined, was the most visible sign of the new correlation of forces. Drawing from the outset extensively on British contributors, to the point of incurring occasional reserve at home, the Manhattan fortnightly eventually achieved such international dominance that it seeded its opposite number in Bloomsbury. Given their approximate similarity of stance, the difference between the two publications said much about their respective contexts.

Where its London offshoot exhibited a quirky individuality of temper, relatively indifferent to celebrity or news-value, combining independence of mind and a certain levity of interest,<sup>9</sup> the much wealthier New York original was more corporate and predictable in style, attached to conventional eminences, but also possessed of another political weight and sense of global priorities, as the intellectual look-out of a superpower.

This alteration in the periodical world, and its economic background, were a harbinger of wider energy transfers in the academic world. From the later sixties onwards, there had been a certain number of migrations from English to American departments. But these remained relatively isolated cases for another decade. It was not until the Conservative regime unleashed its campaign of attrition and compression against the institutions of higher education that a major exit to the United States occurred, in the eighties. By then the differentials in rewards and resources between the two university systems had increased enormously. In a federal state the Reagan administration, anyway more conscious of Japanese rivalry, had neither the same power, nor quite the same inclination, to wage a *Kulturkampf*; competitive pressures in boom conditions rather worked in the opposite direction, at certain levels creating something like an academic bull market. The economic contrast was also one of psychological climate, faculty morale often reflecting available matériel. The result of these push and pull forces was a well publicized exodus from British universities. Although often exaggerated in extent, by the end of the eighties selective departures had affected virtually all social disciplines, and different generations within them, from the retired to the rising. Prominent instances included Ricks, Kermode, McCabe, MacIntyre, Wollheim, Miliband, Ryan, Lukes, Mann, Clark, Brewer, Hobsbawm, Schama, Sen. This was not an emigration in the traditional sense. Many of those who now worked in the US either continued to reside partly in the UK or would return there; nearly all still comprised part of the British intellectual scene, even where assimilation into the American had gone furthest. What the new phenomenon really represented was the increasing erosion of boundaries between the two. The overall process was, of course, rather like the respective visa requirements between the two countries, less than symmetrical in effect—given their discrepancy in size. In the standard hyphenation, it necessarily modified Anglo more than American culture.

The sum of these developments, coming from different horizons and having different effects, amounted to a notable mutation. Englishry in its worst, caricatural forms declined. The ferruginous philistinism and parochialism of long national tradition were discomposed. The monotone political conformities of the ordinary intelligentsia broke up. British culture became looser and more hybrid. What were the consequences, in the principal areas touched on twenty years ago?

---

<sup>9</sup> October 1987 provided a nice illustration of the contrast: the cover of the NYRB was dominated by the crash of the world's stock markets, the LRB's devoted to the fall of trees in the English storm.

Any survey of these can only be selective and uneven, for obvious reasons of competence. The rough outline attempted below reflects not only these limitations. Others follow from the order of approach originally adopted, to which it seems best to remain accountable. The result is bound to be a partial view, liable to many an imbalance and omission. In a first group of disciplines—sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, art history—emphasis falls on individual thinkers, at the expense of a more general report. In a second group—philosophy, political theory, economics, history—attention goes rather to collective trends, with slighter focus on particular figures. Each procedure has its disadvantages: either treatment that is superficial or choice that is arbitrary. If there is a rationale for the difference of approach here, it may be that the newer fields are also less populous, allowing individual bodies of work to achieve a kind of salience that is rarer in older disciplines, with longer traditions. At all events, the interest in looking at them here will be the same: to consider the political currents and intellectual energies each has displayed. These two are, of course, by no means identical. A cultural may lean to the left, without being lively, just as it can innovate without being radical. How have recent British patterns looked, in either regard?

### 3. Sociology

The sketch attempted in 1968 started with a general observation about the lay-out of the whole zone lying between the arts and the natural sciences. Its argument was that Britain had been peculiar among the leading European countries in never having produced either a national Marxism or a classical sociology. These two lacunae were seen as linked. Both historical materialism and the continental sociology which followed it were taken as paradigmatic attempts to grasp the nature of social totalities as a whole—the first a product of the rise of revolutionary labour movements, challenging the order of capital as such; the second an alternative articulated in reaction to them, within the bourgeois civilization of the time. Britain, however, lacking—unlike *fin-de-siècle* Germany, France or Italy—the spur of an insurgent socialism, missed the moment of a Weber, Durkheim or Pareto; and never knew the Marxist reprise of a Lukács, Sartre or Gramsci. Its dominant bloc had no interest in, or need for, any social theory liable to look too analytically at the social formation it governed as a natural kingdom. Piecemeal empirical research, serving practical adjustment or partial reform, was all that was required. Hence the curiosity that, as late as the epoch after the Second World War, sociology had still not gained any general acceptance as a subject in English universities—setting Britain apart from any other major Western country.

This account had various flaws. It relied much too heavily on Parsons's classical reconstruction of the European sociological tradition in *The Structure of Social Action*—a magisterial, but also in many ways misleading work—in dispatching the career of Spencer: a British sociologist of the largest ambitions, even if his major audience was significantly in the USA rather than the UK. Around Spencer, too, there was an underbrush of home-grown enthusiasts for practical

brands of Victorian ratiocination.<sup>20</sup> The earlier English record had thus not been so blank. At the same time the figures of the later European sociologists were also summarily foreshortened, by a too easily constructed contrast with Marx typical of the time. Nevertheless the main judgement was sound enough, and was to be confirmed by the much better founded and more nuanced comparative history of social theory that appeared in the next years, Geoffrey Hawthorn's *Enlightenment and Despair*: 'Sociology was virtually absent in England as an intellectually and academically distinctive pursuit', through the first half of the century, in 'the absence both of any threat of revolution from the left and of any concerted resistance from the right.'<sup>21</sup>

From the early 50's onwards, however, a generation of sociologists formed at the LSE started to emerge, all—as their chronicler puts it—'provincial in social origin, provincial in their political preoccupation, and provincial in their early jobs'.<sup>22</sup> These helped to provide the personnel for the belated institutionalization of the subject in the 60's, when some thirty new university departments were created. Behind them stood their one original senior, T.H. Marshall, theorist of the welfare state: in front, large unexplored tracts of the English class system, to whose empirical study they mostly addressed themselves. A.H. Halsey, drawing their collective self-portrait, admonishes underestimates of their radicalism—'a socialism which had no need for Marxism and no time for communism'. But the terms in which he does so illustrate the charge he seeks to refute: for, he goes on, having learnt the lesson of 'My Country—Right or Left', these were above all intellectuals who knew 'Britain as a decent society' amidst fruitful converse with Whitehall and Westminster.<sup>23</sup> Such was the placid self-satisfaction of the period.

It was this scene which saw the most pronounced change of any discipline in the next twenty years. The original argument, made in 1968, associated the fates of Marxism and sociology—Britain, lacking a national version of the one, had failed to generate a classical achievement in the other. This linkage now found what looked like an *a contrario* vindication. The seventies, as we have seen, did witness the consolidation of a quite powerful Marxist culture in Britain for the first time, centred on a considerable and distinctive corps of historians, one that largely defied the general tide of European opinion. As if in response, there then emerged—as it were on schedule—an outstanding indigenous sociology. Some of the roots of this development went back to the traditional concerns of the fifties and sixties, the patient enquiries into local class lauded by Halsey. But its most remarkable feature represented a striking departure from that past. For what now principally set British sociology apart from

<sup>20</sup> See Lawrence Goldman, 'A Peculiarity of the English? The Social Science Association and the Absence of Sociology in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Past and Present*, No. 114, February 1987, pp. 133–171.

<sup>21</sup> *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Social Theory*, Cambridge 1987, p. 170.

<sup>22</sup> A.H. Halsey, 'Provincials and Professionals: the British Post-War Sociologists', *Annales Européennes de Sociologie*, No. 1, 1982, p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161–62.

its neighbours was the appearance of a series of large-scale theories of history, comparable in scope to that adumbrated by Marx, and conceived to outmatch it. Four major ventures, each with its own leitmotifs, led the field.

### Giddens's Social Ontology

Closest in intellectual origins to the legacy of Marxism, the work of Anthony Giddens has also involved the most direct critique of it. Giddens started his career with a forceful reconstruction of what he argued was the classical base-line of modern social theory: the nature of capitalism as construed in the contrasting thought of Marx, Durkheim and Weber. This inaugural gesture, repeating that of Parsons, consigned it to retirement. *Capitalism and Social Theory* tacitly but conclusively rewrote *The Structure of Social Action* by taking as an organizing framework not the generic problem of order, but the specific arrival of capitalism; eliminating Pareto for Marx as a central figure; and bringing a much finer scholarship to bear, in particular, on Durkheim. Where Parsons ended his book by lamenting Weber's misplaced interest in comparative historical enquiry, as a lowly diversion from the royal road of general action theory, Giddens concluded his by insisting on the need for fresh analysis of the variety of advanced societies in the contemporary world. This task he undertook in his next work, a level-headed and lucid theory of social class that reaffirmed its central importance to the overall structure of capitalist society, with nuanced accounts of upper, new middle and working classes alike; while at the same time maintaining the relatively lesser significance of class—but not thereby of domination—for the character of Communist societies. In either category, Giddens stressed the need for differential analyses of specific countries—rather than indolently taking the (largely atypical) USA as paradigmatic of the former, or the (no longer standardizing) USSR as the model of the latter. Often treated at the time as a neo-Weberian, Giddens could reply with reason that *Class in Advanced Societies* owed 'considerably more to Marx than to Weber'.<sup>14</sup> One could add, not only in conception but in sympathy. Behind the book lay a steady, quietly indicated inclination to the left—quite free from Cold War reflexes, but equally persuaded that the labour movement retained a revolutionary impulse only so long as capitalism still confronted survivals of feudalism.

The later 70's saw a change of focus in Giddens's interests. He had started by criticizing Parsons's displacement of sociological attention away from the concrete questions of capital and class that exercised Marx, Durheim and Weber, and then offered the called-for corrective by reworking their agenda through to the present. He now seems to have felt that the time had come to double back and confront Parsons's original swerve away into a highly generalized action theory, on its own terrain. Arguing that the ostensible 'voluntarism' of the 'action frame of reference' in *The Social System* concealed a surreptitious behaviourism, in which socially effective agency was reduced to a set

---

<sup>14</sup> *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies*, Second Edition, London 1980, p. 296

of need-dispositions and role-expectations, coordinated by internalized values, Giddens turned for remedy to the resources of two opposite traditions: a phenomenology derived from Husserl and Heidegger, and a structuralism descending from Saussure to its posted reversal in Derrida.<sup>15</sup> What Giddens was looking for in these lines of thought was a less determinist notion of social constraint and a more witting conception of human action than Parsons had afforded. The result was a 'theory of structuration', designed to steer between any still undue objectivism and any too aerated subjectivism.

Social structures were henceforward envisaged as virtual sets of rules and resources, at once enabling and constraining human actions. As such, they form both the medium and the outcome of the practices composing a social system—whose agents, for their part, always possess a working knowledge of its institutions that is integral to their operation. Society at large is in this sense 'constituted' by actors reflexively monitoring their own conduct as they reproduce or transform the rules and resources available to them. The intention of Giddens's theory is to strike a just balance between structure and agency in social explanation. But both intellectual and practical impulses tilt his account towards the latter. His original theoretical motive was a rejection of what he saw as Parsons's crypto-determinism; while a political commitment to libertarian socialism, increasingly explicit in his writing, spelt a natural aversion to 'derogation of the lay actor'—the insistent charge Giddens laid at the door of structuralism. The result, however, was to understate considerably the typical pressure of social determinations. Structural relations are not simply rules and resources for actors to employ: they are also forces that shape the nature and aims of actions themselves. Giddens is not unaware of this. Elsewhere he stresses the 'unacknowledged conditions and unanticipated consequences' of human agency, a better formula; but which necessarily weakens the status he claims for the 'knowledgeable actor'—bespeaking all that is not known, and undergone. In the domain of power too, the same bias for the subject reappears, in what is perhaps Giddens's most striking thesis—'the dialectic of control' he suggests is built into the nature of agency as such. 'However subordinate an actor may be in a social relationship, the very fact of involvement in that relationship gives him or her a certain amount of power over the other', such that 'the weak always have some capabilities of turning resources back against the strong'.<sup>16</sup> If the moral-political appeal of this argument is evident, its empirical validity is less so. Perhaps significantly, Giddens's 'type case' is the labour contract in early capitalism—initially strengthening the power of employers over workers, subsequently prompting collective organization against them. It would be more difficult to view the extermination camp in the same light. No universal come-back is granted to every victim of oppression. The realities of the dialectic to which Giddens points are always historically variable, and can be

<sup>15</sup> See especially *New Rules of Sociological Method*, London 1976, pp. 23–70, and *Central Problems in Social Theory*, London 1979, pp. 9–48.

<sup>16</sup> *Central Problems in Social Theory*, pp. 69–73, 6, 145–50; *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, London 1981, p. 63.

truncated altogether. Parsons, declaring his theory of action to be voluntarist, made of it in effect a determinism; Giddens, intending his theory of action to be recursive, renders it close to a voluntarism.

### An Alternative to Historical Materialism?

After advancing a social ontology, Giddens moved on to the record of actual history. His way of doing so was to produce *A Critique of Historical Materialism*—that is, of Marx's general account of human progress, rather than his particular analysis of capitalism. It was a critique of a new kind: one not merely concerned to identify its errors or contradictions, as in a vast existing literature, but for the first time to present a worked-out alternative covering the same ground. The result was to be a trilogy, of which the first two, overlapping volumes have so far appeared. In Giddens's counter-construction, history is not a more or less continuous record of class struggles, but reveals a profoundly discontinuous structure—the advent of capitalism marking a qualitative break with all forms of civilization that had gone before it. Before, political domination in a broad sense—control of 'authoritative resources'—was always more significant than economic domination—or control of 'allocative resources', and typically provided its foundation: class power largely deriving from state power, rather than vice-versa. Societies of this kind—agrarian empires, city-states, feudal realms—were indeed class-divided, but struggle between the classes was no more than sporadic. After, a 'class society' proper emerged in which such conflicts became endemic, as for the first time the economic and political domains were insulated and control of allocative resources became the primary basis of the power of the dominant class (although state administration also penetrated society more thoroughly than ever previously). The real periodization of history is thus not serial, but dichotomous. As such, it reveals no evolutionary pattern of the kind discerned by Marx. Humanity is defined not so much by labour as by meaning, and the forces of production contain no immanent dynamic prior to the arrival of capitalism—the technology of war developing more rapidly than that of agriculture. Where an upward curve can be registered is in a general widening of 'time-space distancing', or the increasing societal capacity to gather, transport and store resources—whether authoritative (taxes, troops, censuses) or allocative (tools, foodstuffs, manufactures).

These proposals, as critics have pointed out, are less at variance with the traditional emphases of historical materialism than Giddens contends. The contrast between the dominance of extra-economic and economic modes of surplus extraction forms, after all, the central theme of Marx's own distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist social formations; indeed there is a striking coincidence between the thrust of Giddens's dichotomy and the views of a Marxist like Ellen Meiksins Wood.<sup>17</sup> A gross divide of the kind such accounts dwell upon is not, of course, incompatible with a finer periodization of historical forms—a major

---

<sup>17</sup>Compare, for example, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, pp. 210 ff., with Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism', *NLA* 127, May-June 1981, pp. 83-86 ff.

concern for the Marxist tradition in its own right. Rejection of any cumulative trend for the forces of production to develop across time does, by contrast, directly contradict a central premise of historical materialism. But here the weight of evidence is clearly on its side: a moderately formulated evolutionism has no difficulty in defending its plausibility, as Erik Olin Wright has shown.<sup>18</sup> In fact Giddens himself, while overtly repudiating all evolutionary theories of history, tacitly reinstates one. Simply, directionality lies in the stretching of time and space rather than in increasing the productivity of labour.

The difference between the two is, of course, that whereas the latter is an economic dynamic, the progress of the former mingles political and economic elements—advance in the resources of authority and allocation alike. If Giddens differs less from Marxist traditions than might appear in his periodization of human development and attribution of a trend-line to it, his view of its causality does separate him sharply from them. Within the gamut of his key resources, the proportions are in principle indeterminate. 'All social life is contingent, all social change is conjunctural.'<sup>19</sup> There is no predominant or persistent hierarchy of causes. Giddens presses this claim most directly in his second volume, where he argues that capitalism, industrialism and the nation-state—treated as a unity generated by the first term, in historical materialism—represent three separate 'organizational clusters', whose original association in Europe was fortuitous: indeed could have been cancelled but for the accident of the First World War.<sup>20</sup> While Giddens's rejection of reductive explanations of the nation-state—and the new administrative and ideological powers it could mobilize—in terms of the sheer functional needs of capitalism, is well-founded, his appeals to chance disable the possibility of better ones. His own account makes little attempt to trace out a more complex and precise causality of the connexion between his three clusters; rather than an explanatory analysis it rests on a descriptive juxtaposition of them, whose warrant is the waiver given all requirements of deeper necessity.

From his theoretical corrections of historical materialism, Giddens draws political conclusions. From the outset, he consistently stated his aim to be a critique of Marxism from the Left, 'outflanking' it with a more radical scrutiny of the problems and prospects of human emancipation.<sup>21</sup> The corollary of his dissociation of capital, industry and nation-state is thus a political agenda that seeks not to dismiss the exploitation of labour, but to avoid assimilating, or subordinating, the dangers of ecological destruction and of military violence—or civil invigilation—to it. Among these, Giddens gives greatest attention to

<sup>18</sup> See his fine essay, 'Giddens's Critique of Marxism', *NLS* 138, March–April 1983, pp. 24–34.

<sup>19</sup> *The Constitution of Society*, London 1984, p. 245.

<sup>20</sup> 'If the course of events in the Great War, including the participation of the USA in the hostilities and the peace settlement, had not taken the shape they did, the nation-state in its current form might not have become the dominant political entity in the world system': *The Nation-State and Violence*, London 1985, pp. 234–35.

<sup>21</sup> *Sociology—A Brief but Critical Introduction*, London 1982, p. 169; *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory*, London 1982, p. 227.



the threat of nuclear war. In its shadow we live in a world 'at a vast distance from the future anticipated by Marx, with few obviously available paths of moving towards it', where in any case the multi-formity of jeopardy and injustice means that socialism can itself no longer be 'the sole model of the "good society"'.<sup>22</sup> In consequence, a viable critical theory today will inevitably be post-Marxist. In common with most exponents of the term, Giddens stresses the absence of any privileged agents of liberation (or pacification), and the disparate character of the existing forces struggling towards them. But untypically, he is sceptical of the view, to be found in Habermas or Gorz, that 'the "newer" forms of social movement are increasingly replacing the labour movement as frameworks of struggle'.<sup>23</sup> Giddens never believed in a revolutionary vocation of the working-class, once capitalism had reached maturity; but he also seldom doubted the relative political efficacy of the labour movement in its subsequent forms. If Marx was wrong in the nature of the world-historical role he ascribed to the proletariat, he was nevertheless right in predicting that — it would play one. No such forecast can be made, with any confidence, of the peace movements today. 'In terms of historical agencies of change, there is no parallel in the sphere of weaponry to the proletariat in the area of industrial labour. No plausible "dialectical counterpart" to the progressive accumulation of military power seems to exist.' Hence the need, felt by others besides Giddens, to summon a 'renewal of utopianism, mixed with the firmest forms of realism'.<sup>24</sup> Politically, few socialists would dissent. But in terms of Giddens's theory as a whole, it is as if here the dialectic of control threatens to become suspended, or peter out. The outlook for the subject has changed. Where Giddens's ontology evinces an unreasonable optimism of the agent, his history moves towards an unseasonable pessimism.

### Mann's Analysis of the Working Class

Parallel or overlapping in many respects, Michael Mann's work has issued into a different kind of achievement. After beginning as empirical sociologist of class in the regular British mould, with a monograph on the effects of factory relocation on labour-force attitudes, Mann published a seminal essay on the 'Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy', attacking the prevalent view that value-consensus was the cement of political order in Western capitalism. Anticipating by a decade subsequent critiques of 'the dominant ideology thesis', Mann argued that normative patterns in US or British society were in fact heterogeneous and inconsistent, amounting to no governing belief system that would ensure the stability of the state: the subordinate classes accepted the status quo for pragmatic reasons, in the absence of visible alternatives, rather than out of any inward conviction of its rightness.<sup>25</sup> The critical thrust of this thesis was aimed both at Parsonian apologias for capitalist democracy, and at the overstatements of Marxist exposure of it.

<sup>22</sup> *The Nation-State and Violence*, pp. 3, 337.

<sup>23</sup> *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, London 1987, pp. 50, 225-52, 275-96.

<sup>24</sup> *The Nation-State and Violence*, p. 326.

<sup>25</sup> *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 35 No. 3, 1970, pp. 423-39

*Consciousness and Action among the Western Working Class* had the same two-edged force, cutting against the claims of end-of-ideology and Marxist theories of labour alike. At a time of generic rhetorical declamations on either side, Mann pointed out the range of potential varieties of working-class consciousness, and the need to distinguish between simple awareness of class identity, elemental sense of class opposition, developed conceptions of a class-determined social totality, and revolutionary conviction of overall class alternatives to the existing order. The predominant pattern in the contemporary Western world combined only the first two elements, with the result that industrial and political action were rarely integrated by the labour movement. Within the typical forms of industrial action itself, struggles over pay were usually separated from struggles over control, and the former nearly always prevailed over the latter: for an aggressive economism can extract higher wages from employers without loss to them if productivity is growing, while disputes over control tend by their nature to be zero-sum conflicts in which workers can gain only if management loses—hence the far tougher stance of capital in this area, and the much more defensive posture of labour, for the most part concerned only with job regulation. If technical and scientific workers reveal more sense of totality and alternative—hence greater interest in issues of control—than the traditional working-class, they also, by reason of their relatively privileged position, possess less sense of collective identity and opposition.

Mann's conclusion was therefore that there existed 'a fatal contradiction within the working-class movement. Those who are most alienated and most desperate are those who are least confident of their ability to change the situation. Those who are most confident in their own power and clearest in their intentions feel least embattled and disposed towards desperate remedies.'<sup>26</sup> Historically, this had not precluded the emergence of genuinely revolutionary labour movements. But these arose where the ruling order was not yet a fully modern capitalist hegemony, and uprooted migrants from an archaic rural society encountered large-scale industry, in contexts where there were strong pre-capitalist traditions of violent political conflict. Marx was right to identify the central contradiction of capitalism as the conflict between the interests of capital and of labour, and to assert the inherent tendency of the working-class towards its own collective identity and organization. But the long-term outcome of these processes was by no means the proletarian revolution he had predicted. 'The working class does not carry within itself a new form of social order.'<sup>27</sup>

The similarities between the positions of Giddens and Mann at this date were obvious, and acknowledged. Mann was less concerned with theoretical definitions of class structure, and more interested in the practical upshots of class action. Politically there was probably little separating the two, though Mann's socialism seems to have taken a more institutional and programmatic direction. Active on the Left of

<sup>26</sup> *Consciousness and Action among the Western Working Class*, London 1973, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

the Labour Party in the late 70's, by the mid 80's he was offering a detailed social analysis of the British electorate to the Party, as an empirical basis for identifying those constituencies that could be won to it—perhaps the most informed and concrete map of its kind to be produced in the Labour debates of that time.<sup>28</sup> The ideology capable of uniting the Party and conquering a majority, Mann argued, would be a contemporary version of the idea of social citizenship once theorized by Marshall.

### Sources of Social Power

During the 70's, Mann's major interests had meanwhile moved—like those of Giddens—away from the problematic of class. But where Giddens shifted towards the area of ontology, Mann plunged directly into history, and in far greater depth and detail than his colleague was subsequently to do. The outcome was the grandiose project of *The Sources of Social Power*, the first volume of which is the most commanding single work of the new British sociology, and a landmark in the discipline *tout court*. Following Parsons, Mann distinguishes at the outset between two types of power: 'distributive', or control by some agents over others, and 'collective', or mutual enlargement of capabilities; but refines them into the 'extensive' and 'intensive', 'authoritative' and 'diffused' forms of each—corresponding roughly to their geographical reach or vertical efficiency, extent or lack of premeditation, respectively. At the same time, following Weber, he postulates three general sources of such power—economic, ideological and military, no one of which possesses any overall causal primacy in history, their order of relative significance varying greatly by epoch and region; but adds territorial administration as a fourth 'political' source of power, separate from armed coercion. These diverse sources of power, in turn, are not tidily stacked within societies that encase them. For 'societies' themselves are neither unitary nor bounded totalities but heterogeneous, overlapping networks of social interaction, without fixed edges—which, precisely for that reason, characteristically tend to permit the emergence of 'interstitial surprises' capable of eventually challenging or bypassing the dominant institutional forms of power.

With these navigating instruments, Mann undertakes a Magellan-like voyage through the history of humanity from the Neolithic Age to the Enlightenment. The result is a vast narrative of power, of great deftness and assurance, marrying theoretical subtlety and empirical grasp. Mann's complex typology of the modes and sources of power does not remain a mere formal taxonomy. It is put to work, with arresting effect, through his study of the 'exact infrastructures' of each medium of power in successive epochs: military logistics, cultural literacy, bureaucratic recruitment, juridical machinery, monetary flow, fiscal catchment. The unremitting attention given to these practical preconditions for the activation of formal claims to power is what gives Mann's account, for all his disavowals, its peculiarly materialist cast.

<sup>28</sup> *Socialism Can Survive—Social Change and the Labour Party*, Fabian Pamphlet No. 302, London 1985.

Yet the disavowals are also germane. Historical in its conception and materialist in its application, Mann's work is at the same time a rejection of historical materialism—or a reminder that there may be more than one of them. Denial of any generalizable causal hierarchy in the record of the past is a central tenet of *The Sources of Social Power*, as it was for Weber. Mann, however, sets out to specify the permutations in the dominant source of power across several millennia, a diachronic reconstruction Weber never attempted. On the other hand Weber's sociology explored large synchronic comparisons between civilizations, which Mann renounces. The result is to narrow his history, original in its conceptual framework, to a conventional spatial zone: essentially the familiar story of Occidental civilization, from its origins in the Near East and Mediterranean to its apotheosis in the North Atlantic. Mann wishes, like so many others, to explain the reasons for the ultimate triumph of Western Europe over the rest of the world—what set it apart and then above all rivals, on the plane of power. But true difference can only be established by contrast. Avoiding all comparative analysis of Chinese or Arabo-Turkic civilizations, among others, Mann would seem to deprive himself of any basis for a causal explanation of Western specificity. In fact, however, an originating comparison quietly straddles the narrative, and covertly dictates its outcome. Its medium is religion. After a masterly analysis of the spread of Christianity in the Roman world, Mann appends a digression on Confucianism, Islam and Hinduism as alternative doctrines of salvation. Here the *differentia specifica* of the faith of the West is insinuated between the lines. The dynamism of these 'transcendent ideologies' depended on their degree of egalitarian universalism, everywhere in contradiction with the authoritarian—clerical or secular—institutions embodying or diffusing them. By this standard, Confucianism was at once too elite and too ethnic a creed—Chinese identity being unproblematic; Hinduism was too blatantly hierarchical in its proliferations of caste and fixations with purity; while Islam was too compromised with tribalism, as well as too rudimentary in doctrine. All of these religions provided a 'normative pacification' vital to the zones where they prevailed; but the Christian faith achieved a higher order of it by a combination of greater social universality and spiritual complexity. As a track-layer of civilizational development, 'Christianity proved so far superior to the others that all had to adapt to its encroachments' in the end.<sup>29</sup> For while economic, political and military networks of power all played contributory parts in the later genesis of the 'European miracle', it was the ideological network of Christendom that alone was essential to it.

### Nature and Society

The decisive determinant of the largest watershed in world history—the advent of European commercial and industrial supremacy—is thus located in the mediaeval Church. This may look like a down-dated version of Weber's claims for the Protestant ethic. But it is in fact much closer to Durkheim's view of religion—the central achievement

<sup>29</sup> *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. I, London 1986, pp. 341–71

attributed to Catholic Christianity being its creation of a common identity across the continent, through its missionary and pastoral work from the Dark Ages onwards. Social cohesion, not individual vocation, is the leitmotif of Mann's explanation. The empirical weaknesses of this construction have been pointed out in these pages.<sup>30</sup> They may derive, however, from a theoretical predisposition. Mann starts by defining his focus as 'social power': that is, if distributive, 'mastery over other people', and if collective, dominance 'over third parties or nature'.<sup>31</sup> Relations with nature thus comprise only, so to speak, a quarter of his initial agenda. One result is to tilt his account of religion sharply away from its resolution of human tensions with the natural order, towards its function as a mortar of the social order. Theology is, so to speak, over-socialized. Another consequence is that Mann's attention to the economic processes that are usually taken to be the centrepiece of the unique metamorphosis of Europe becomes relatively marginal. For production is always necessarily, in the first instance, a transformation of nature. In the pre-modern world ideology and economy alike are irreducibly connected to the physical universe—as practical and imaginary mediations to nature. By contrast Mann's other two sources of power, the military and the political, are purely intra-social in their operation, and it is no accident that it is towards them that the weight of his account shifts once the Christian faith has laid the groundwork for European ascendancy.

The development from 'coordinating' mediaeval princedoms to 'organic' national states forms the real climax of Mann's story. Essentially, what he shows is the way in which the exigencies of war were the forcing-house of taxation and administration—the requirements of external military power nursing the conditions of internal political power. Yet for Mann, the state as such is defined by its monopoly of the latter rather than the former—since military violence, like economic wealth or ideological authority, has historically been a capacity of many groups within civil society, as well as the state. It is only 'centralized territorial regulation' that has been an exclusive attribute of the state; and it is this political power proper that is the foundation of its autonomy from civil society. Mann's bid to break with the trichotomy common to the Marxist and Weberian tradition thus has a strong conclusive purpose. But it issues in a—perhaps provisional—double paradox. For the source of power that confers autonomy on the state itself enjoys least autonomy of all: political regulation is scarcely conceivable without the resources of armed coercion, fiscal revenue and ideal legitimation. At the same time, the development of centralized territorial administration culminates in 'organic' national states that not only penetrate civil life deeply at all levels for the first time, but also demarcate it with frontiers of a quite new institutional efficacy—thereby tending to create something very like those 'bounded totalities' Mann's theory

<sup>30</sup> Chris Wickham, 'Historical Materialism, Historical Sociology', *NLR* 171, September–October 1988, pp. 63–80—the best critical assessment of Mann's work to date.

<sup>31</sup> *The Sources of Social Power*, p. 6.

set out to deny. Rather than states arising from societies, one might say, societies—hitherto declared notional—risk appearing the offspring of states. Problems such as these are left for the sequels.

### Weberian Influences

The intellectual background of the third outstanding construction of this period was rather different. The career of W.G. Runciman started earlier, well before the commotion of the late sixties; something of the characteristic tone of the fifties, a certain self-conscious formality of manner, moderation, attaching to all his later writing. His first short book, *Social Science and Political Theory*, took the Anglo-Saxon political philosophy of the time as an accepted starting-point, but sought to impress on it the need to be informed by unfamiliar traditions of European sociology. Among these, pride of place was given to Weber. Class was indeed the most important social basis of political conflict in industrialized societies, but it was to be viewed as Weber and not Marx had understood it.<sup>32</sup> Democracy was best theorized by Schumpeter, and the British version of it—whatever objections might be made to our electoral system—was a model of stability and strong government. The one weakness of Weber was his belief that all values were relative to the social scientist—a fallacy corrected by H.A.L. Hart, who had demonstrated the universality of the 'minimum content of natural law', so providing a sound common basis for political philosophy. Subsequent essays, collected under the significant rubric of *Sociology in its Place*, confirmed much of this initial set at the subject. Weber's triad of class, status and party was upheld so firmly that its lack of universal acceptance could be treated as puzzle; just as his account of religion was preferred to that of Durkheim, and his typology of legitimacy was vindicated through contemporary African example. This strong Weberian commitment was nevertheless not undiluted. The force of the title essay was to cut the pretensions of sociology down to the standard bedrock of current Anglo-Saxon positivism—behavioural psychology. Sociologists, Runciman declared flatly, 'will never develop an autonomous "sociological" theory' that could be a substitute for such a 'psychoethology'<sup>33</sup>—a reductionist credo testifying to the persistence of the psychologistic strain in the intellectual orthodoxy of the time.

On the other hand, Runciman had meanwhile published an influential study, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*, designed to execute his more fruitful programme of bringing together sociology and political philosophy. Runciman borrowed the notion of 'relative deprivation' to explain the discrepancies between objective social inequalities in Britain and subjective perceptions of them. But the real innovation of the study lay in its extended deployment of Weber's three types of stratification as distinct dimensions of inequality in British society, tracked historically from the end of the First World War to the early sixties, and its carefully periodized enquiry into the reaction of the working-class to them. Runciman's findings were that

<sup>32</sup> *Social Science and Political Theory*, Cambridge 1963, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Sociology in its Place*, Cambridge 1970, pp. 41–42.

British workers had shown decreasing resentment of class inequality after the Depression, although actual income had not been commensurately redistributed; on the other hand, increasing resentment of status inequality since the Second World War, although actual differences of esteem had diminished; and declining political militancy since the Attlee government, despite the absence of any basic change in the pattern of power. All these conclusions remain persuasive. Unnoticed in the arrival at them, however, was an anomaly running through Runciman's whole procedure. Class was taken as merely one of Weber's three dimensions of inequality, on a par with status and party, in the social consciousness of agents; but it was simultaneously taken as the basic ground of the social being of those agents—the 'British working class' appearing unproblematically throughout as the objective vector of those variations in subjectively experienced 'deprivation' which Runciman was concerned to trace. One might say that this was to have a Marxist cake and make a Weberian meal out of it.

The second part of the book shifted gear to sketch the normative outline of a society more equal than that of contemporary Britain. Here Runciman drew on Rawls's early work. This was historically the first use of the contractarian model later developed in *A Theory of Justice*, and its great interest—apart from its date—is the 'fairly radical' consequences, in his own words, which Runciman derived from it: much greater industrial democracy than mainstream British trade-unionism demanded; stiff progressive taxation to ensure egalitarian provision for needs; and a common system of education for all children.<sup>34</sup> A just society would resemble the USA in democracy of manners, but with the 'missing ingredient' of socialism—understood not as social ownership of the means of production (possibly, but not necessarily, preferable to private control of them), but as acceptance of the criterion of social need. Perhaps more strikingly, Runciman directly confronted a central question avoided by Rawls, the problem of the transition to any just social organization. Since the achievement of social justice could never be swift or painless, Runciman observed, 'there may always be good reasons why social justice should not be done, even where it can be shown that inequalities are unjust.' Consequently, in his own society, 'if the evidence has shown that the British are a people little given either to envy or to radicalism, this is not something which calls at once or without question for remedy.'<sup>35</sup>

This Laodicean note was to become more rather than less pronounced as significant social sectors started to behave in unBritish fashion soon after the publication of Runciman's book. A decade later he set out his political positions in a pamphlet for the Tawney Society, linked to the newly formed SDP. *Where is the Right of the Left?* argued that the state should seek to spread private ownership of companies rather than extend the public sector, and that managerial hierarchy within them ought to be free from government or union interference. But taxation should be progressive, educational opportunity increased,

<sup>34</sup> *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*, London 1966, pp. 258–72.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 294–95.

monopoly restrained, and employees consulted. Such a package, Runciman explained, dispensed with the terms 'capitalism' and 'socialism', for it was 'compatible with a society that could quite well be labelled as a version of both or either'.<sup>36</sup> Ideological amenability of this kind is usually less than it appears, and Runciman was rather blunter elsewhere: 'The truth is that it is no longer possible to formulate a "radical alternative" which can coherently reconcile the traditional set of socialist but still democratic objectives.'<sup>37</sup> While Runciman continued to reject the notion of a Centre politics, the shift along the spectrum within the Left is clear enough.

### A Distinctive Synthesis

Runciman's major sociological enterprise, *A Treatise on Social Theory* in three volumes, started to appear in the early eighties. In conception, this was the most original of all the large projects undertaken in this period. The methodology of the social sciences occupies the first volume; a substantive theory of social evolution is presented in the second; the history of twentieth-century Britain will form a case-study calculated to illustrate method and substance alike in the third. Runciman's epistemology formally aims at 'steering a safely manageable course between the Scylla of positivistic empiricism and the Charybdis of phenomenological hermeneutics'<sup>38</sup>—a goal that looks deceptively close to formulations of Giddens. Runciman's stance is in fact absolutely distinctive. The first volume of the *Treatise* unites four claims, each bold enough in its own right, in a provocative synthesis of opposites. The understanding of any society comprises, for Runciman: theory-neutral reportage of the empirical facts of the social order; theoretical explanation of its governing structures, common in kind to the natural sciences; and authentic description of its lived textures. Such understanding, if properly conducted, moreover always involves an evaluation specific to the social sciences, informed by the principle of an impartial benevolence. Scarcely one of these contentions is free from scandal, in many circles—the notion of an unprejudiced inventory of data, without conceptual preemption, being widely deemed the positivist illusion *par excellence*, and any assimilation of the social to the natural sciences *a fortiori* anathema. Even opinion more inclined to accept these tenets might well draw back from the further assertion that there exists a universal moral ground at once inherent in and mandatory for any social science, which can be expressed in terms derived from Bentham. The confidence of these claims could be taken for an arrant scientism. The other ingredient of Runciman's programme, however, calls for an imaginative recapture of subjective experience normally associated with poetry or fiction: his own exemplars, indeed, including Flaubert and Angela Carter. Under the mild guise of 'description', in other words, there lies a prodigious hermeneutic ambition. Nor is this mode of social understanding any mere extra, or intellectual luxury. On the contrary, it

<sup>36</sup> *Where is the Right of the Left?*, London 1983, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> 'On the State of the Left', *London Review of Books*, 17 December 1982.

<sup>38</sup> *A Treatise on Social Theory*, Vol. I, *The Methodology of Social Theory*, Cambridge 1983, p. 144.



marks what is specific to the enterprise of sociology itself: 'The distinctive problems of the social sciences are problems of description and not of explanation.'<sup>39</sup>

Each element of the complete prescription is set out with great cogency. There has been no better recent statement of the unity of scientific method in the task of explanation; and few more vivid accounts of the literary requirements for the task of re-creation. But can these two be so readily reconciled? Setting aside the—daunting—practical demands their combination would put on most adepts of the social sciences, there is a theoretical dislocation between them. For while reportage and explanation, Runciman remarks, inevitably answer to a correspondence theory of truth, he argues that description is subject to a coherence conception. A strict rationalism of structural analysis is thus joined to something like a broad relativism of experiential retrieval. The polarization seems undue: all descriptions, in Runciman's sense, being subject to judgements of accuracy as well as authenticity. On the other hand, if Runciman overstates the veridical difference between explanation and description, he understates—to put it mildly—the difficulty of lodging consensual evaluation in the act of reportage (or explanation) itself. The notion that all social scientists, of whatever school, 'share some sort of tacit, if unspecific, commitment to the value of benevolence',<sup>40</sup> has forgotten the statisticians of the ss. Where Weber once saw the social sciences haunted by the warring deities of a new polytheism, in incurable conflict with each other, Runciman appears to project a placid division of labour between them.

### Runciman's Social Typology

The second volume of the *Treatise* aims, in its turn, to surpass *Economy and Society* in two fundamental respects, by proposing a more orderly and systematic taxonomy of the historical range of societies than Weber's uncompleted *chef d'oeuvre* was able to do, and by demonstrating a directionality to them more compelling than his epos of rationalization. Runciman's classification of social forms is founded on the Weberian triad that runs through all his work, here lent a vocabulary deliberately adapted from Marx. Power comes in three, and only three, forms—economic, ideological and coercive—which compose separate modes of production, persuasion and coercion. Although always interwoven, these may vary independently of each other: no fixed inter-relation or causal hierarchy exists between them. Each mode has its gamut of distinct historical variants—here reckoned as eight of economic power, eight of ideological, seven of coercive. It is the specific combination of these that constitutes any given society, defined as a particular 'mode of distribution of power'. From this Linnaean-style grid, Runciman develops a typology of the actual societal forms exhibited by the historical record. The sweep of the resultant survey is magisterially comparative, embracing not only the East Asian, Islamic and Indo-American experiences set aside by

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 304.

Mann, but a rich spectrum of African and Pacific communities as well.<sup>41</sup> The resultant taxonomy is without question better organized and more fully informed than Weber's. But its fulcrum exacts a perceptible cost. For the distribution of power is never simply coextensive with the contours of society. Runciman's focus on this alone is still more single-minded than Mann's, and with some nuances it yields the same kind of effects. In this treatment ideological life is reduced to the work of securing, not socialization, but deference—its every other dimension set aside. Economic life, despite ostensible reference to modes of production, is equated with mechanisms of exchange and exploitation alone, as in those versions of Marxism that subsume or dissolve forces of production entirely into relations of production.

One consequence is that Runciman's typology itself lacks any dynamic, of the sort assigned to such forces in a more classical historical materialism. His inventory of some fourteen basic patterns of power is nevertheless aligned in a temporal series from hunter-gatherer to industrial societies. But this economic chronology, figuring a long-run growth of 'resources',<sup>42</sup> remains extrinsic to the political typology of 'power'—a shadow reference lying unarticulated behind it, rather than a directive principle of it. The function of a narrative, disavowed in traditional forms, devolves onto a general theory of social evolution. Each dimension of power, Runciman argues, is sustained by specific practices, carried by particular groups. It is the competition between rival practices, in which the criterion of success is the exercise of power itself, that acts as the equivalent of natural selection, generating the morphology of social forms. In this process, no less objective and unintended than its biological counterpart, the origins of practices themselves can be treated as random inputs, like genetic mutations, for the explanation of evolutionary shifts. Not innovation, but selection, is what matters for the course of history.

Runciman brings this Darwinian model of social change to bear on an extended set of test cases: the emergence of feudalism in Western Europe, Poland, Japan, Iran, the late Ottoman Empire, Latin America; of absolutism in China, Japan, France, Prussia, Russia, the Roman Empire; of a liberal industrialism in England, authoritarian in Japan and Argentina, socialist in Russia. The directionality of these transformations is, as in Spencer, towards increasing complexity; but the subtlety with which they are explored is of another order. Curiously, however, the central mechanism of social selection is by comparison somewhat underspecified: competition is more invoked as a principle than traced through as a process, the alternative practices actually outrivalled often remaining elusive. At the same time, the sources of variation in human history—that which throws up new material for the process of selection itself—are not easily compared

<sup>41</sup> Earlier case studies of Classical Greece, Republican Rome, Anglo-Saxon England, the French Revolution and Polish Communism are now collected in *Confessions of a Reluctant Theorist*, London 1989, pp. 53–189.

<sup>42</sup> *A Treatise on Social Theory*, Vol. II, *Substantive Social Theory*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 39, 76–77.

with the mutations of biological evolution. For there is no radical difference in nature between the innovation and adoption of practices, as social processes: conscious intentionality is the common medium of each, calling for the same kind of theoretical explanations. Beginnings cannot be divorced from endings, as if they belonged to another order accidental to this one. Through the customary web of unlooked-for consequences, human agency unites them. Runciman exactly reverses Weber's option, who declared that it was the origins of the Protestant ethic that interested him, not the reasons why it was selected by the spirit of capitalism.<sup>43</sup> A fully historical sociology, however, will pursue both sorts of question, and the vocabulary of its answers can only be one. It will be intriguing to see how far the division between the random and the regular, inscribed here in a general theory of social evolution, can be maintained in the closer account of modern British development to follow it.

### An Enlightenment Intellectual

Set somewhat apart from these serialists and system-builders, there is finally the singular oeuvre of Ernest Gellner. Senior in generation and Central European in background, Gellner has also always been a philosopher and anthropologist as much as—indeed before—a sociologist. His multifarious writings, a rutilant harlequinade of ideas, covers a wider span of topics than that of any contemporary: the epistemology of Wittgenstein, Quine or Popper; the foibles of ethnomethodology, and the merits of functionalism; the social mould of the Muslim world, and the cultural sway of Freudian psychoanalysis; the rise of nationalism, and the nature of science; Weber's disenchantment and Arendt's totalitarianism; relativism, expressivism, structuralism; Hume and Nietzsche; revolution and liberalization.<sup>44</sup> Gellner's position within the national culture, less that of an academic authority than of an enlightenment intellectual, is a reminder of something that has changed since the time of *Words and Things*. The dominance of a White emigration has passed away. Not that there were fewer such arrivals in the Anglo-Saxon world in the past twenty years—on the contrary, police repression and persecution in the East ensured a greater flow than before the War. But now, in a suggestive reversal of the pattern of the thirties, the majority settled in the United States (or France), rather than the United Kingdom. The archetypal figure of the new wave, who might have filled the role of disillusioned sage in Britain, was the Pole Leszek Kolakowski; but he seems to have found Oxford insufficiently bracing, preferring the more congenial environment of Chicago.

Gellner's politics have none of the connexions with the Left that mark the work of Giddens, Mann or Runciman, but they are free from any zealotry of the Right as well. They might be described as that rare

<sup>43</sup> Compare *A Treatise on Social Theory*, Vol. II, pp. xxv with *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London 1930, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup> See, in the past decade, *Spectacles and Predicaments* (1980); *Muslim Society* (1981); *Nations and Nationalism* (1983); *Relativism in the Social Sciences* (1985), *The Psychoanalytic Movement* (1985); *Culture, Identity and Politics* (1987).

thing, a genuine independent liberalism. Class and capitalism ('an over-rated concept') were never central preoccupations, as they were for the younger generation of British sociologists. On the other hand, the ideology of the free market was always caustically viewed as a screen for political distribution of life-chances. Given this very different outlook, it is all the more striking that Gellner too developed much of his historical sociology through a confrontation with Marxism. In his case, however, it was Eastern rather than Western Marxism that provided the critical foil. No country in Central Europe had a more tragic fate under Communist rule than his native Czechoslovakia, an experience about which Gellner has written well.<sup>45</sup> But this never prevented, may even have partly prompted, a sympathetic interest in the intellectual life of the USSR, which eventually produced *State and Society in Soviet Thought*.

Two themes emerge from this critical survey of the better Soviet Marxism that found expression in the depths of the Brezhnev period. The first is respect for its typical concern with large issues, about which too many Western thinkers had become blasé. 'The crucial fact about humanity is that a species, which a few millennia ago consisted of small, powerless, and ignorant bands, is now unbelievably numerous, powerful and knowledgeable. This is *the* rags-to-riches story which, above all others, needs to be understood.'<sup>46</sup> In Gellner's view, the more intelligent Soviet thinkers rarely lost sight of this central question, and in trying to answer it developed evolutionary typologies at least as fertile as conventional functionalist paradigms on the other side of the Iron Curtain, with a robust spirit forming a refreshing contrast to the evasive and etiolated styles of Western Marxism. On the other hand, Gellner points to recurrent weaknesses of much of this theoretical work: above all, in his opinion, a reluctance to admit that coercion is often historically more decisive than production in shaping societies, and does not arise from it. In 'Asiatic' empires, states led to the creation of classes rather than vice-versa. In nomadic societies, lack of major internal stratification was no obstacle to practices of predation spiralling into state construction, and then lapsing back to clan level, without any change in economic base. Communist societies themselves display, supremely, the elevation of political coercion over economic possession as a structural principle. Gellner's insistence on the role of force in determining particular social outcomes coexists with an equal emphasis on the impact of technology in marking general historical watersheds. Against the fivefold schema still prevalent in Soviet Marxism—primitive society, slave society, feudalism, capitalism and socialism—he upheld a simpler three-way classification into foraging, agrarian and industrial societies, contending that this is actually the more materialist, in so far as it turns on fundamental techniques of securing a livelihood rather than more superficial vicissitudes of social organization. Marxist interpretations of history are thus, as it were, trumped at both ends—convicted at once of giving too much and too little importance to material production.

<sup>45</sup> See *Spectacles and Predicaments*, Cambridge 1980, pp. 341–49, *Culture, Identity and Politics*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 123–33.

<sup>46</sup> *State and Society in Soviet Thought*, Oxford 1988, p. 116.

## The Logic of World History

These themes reappear in the wide-angled synthesis that brings together Gellner's own vision of past and present, *Plough, Sword and Book*. Subtitled simply 'The Structure of Human History', this distils his distinctive sociology of development, hitherto strewn across a profusion of topics, into a single master-story of the species. By contrast with Mann, Gellner disavows any inductive ambition. His account, although empirically (well-) informed, does not proceed evidentially but deductively, seeking out the logic of world history, rather than reconstructing the details of its episodes. Unlike Runciman, on the other hand, he rejects any analogy with biological evolution, on the grounds that historical innovations are transmitted by culture, which therefore perpetuates acquired characteristics in a way that natural selection forbids. The enumeration of the main phases of human development is actually much the same in the two; but what is a background sketch for the one becomes the foreground drama of the other. If Runciman's typology remains unintegrated with his periodization, however, Gellner's periodization dispenses with any typology. Each of his three great stages of development—Foragia, Agraria and Industria—permits a 'bewildering variety' of societal forms, undetermined by their respective bases of production. The technical level of economic life only sets problems for social organization: it supplies no solutions. Specific social structures are always shaped by a triad of forces—production, coercion and cognition—whose relative importance varies significantly throughout history.

This standpoint looks very close to that of the *Treatise on Social Theory*. But there is one crucial difference. Gellner speaks of cognition, not persuasion. Nor does he treat such cognition as *ipso facto* a modality of power. The realm of ideas and meanings, reduced to ideological domination or cohesion by Runciman and Mann, is here granted something more like its real space, between nature and society as well as within society. Yet this gain is not unqualified. For Gellner's account exhibits a deep and pervasive ambiguity about the nature of 'cognition' itself. Taken at face value, the term seems just to connote knowledge—above all, perhaps, of the physical universe. In modern conditions, Gellner indeed formally distinguishes it from 'culture', which he defines as 'conceptualization minus cognition'.<sup>47</sup> Culture in this sense, as custom and credence rather than knowledge, receives a cool billing in his writing as a whole: exaggeration of its importance in shaping society and history is repeatedly attacked, as an idealist illusion.<sup>48</sup> In other words, where for his juniors it is overwhelmingly ideology, for him—so it would appear—it is essentially knowledge that is historically salient, as one of the three great causal forces of social development. In practice, however, Gellner does not maintain a consistent distinction between the two, and normally uses cognition as a virtual synonym for culture in its inclusive sense, embracing ritual, belief or value as well as knowledge. But the bias of the underlying

<sup>47</sup> *Plough, Sword and Book*, London 1988, p. 206.

<sup>48</sup> See inter alia *Plough, Sword and Book*, p. 274, *Relativism in the Social Sciences*, p. 179; *Spectacles and Predicaments*, pp. 54–56, 98–99.

conception has a very strong, and ironic consequence for the realization of his theoretical programme. For paradoxically, once cognition is presumptively separated from culture, it can be tacitly promoted to the very role Gellner refuses the latter. In *Plough, Sword and Book*, the transformations of knowledge become to all intents and purposes the prime mover of historical change. Dismissing all culturalism, Gellner advances instead a cognitivism: Hegel gives way to Comte.

The structure of human history, in this account, is marked by two great watersheds, the transition from hunting-and-gathering to agriculture, and from agriculture to industry—the Neolithic and the Industrial Revolutions. The first of these, Gellner contends, must have occurred when certain foraging bands hit on the notion of delayed returns, sowing today in order to reap tomorrow. It was thus an intellectual shift in preference horizon that originally allowed sedentary agrarian societies to emerge. Once these became consolidated, they were usually dominated by military-clerical elites specializing in coercion and cognition. But since coercive strata were typically fragmented, in conditions of precarious central control and endemic potential division between them, ideological legitimacy became critical to their rivalries, and this was in the keeping of the cognitive guardians—the clerisy arbitrating the fortunes of the military. In this long interval, the great stretch of Agraria lying between foraging and manufacturing societies, a basic change came over cognition itself. Originally tribal humanity employed a multi-stranded language, in which referential and ceremonial dimensions were essentially fused: sophisticated awareness of the physical environment inextricably mixed with superstitious investment of it, practical adjustment and magical belief joining in *la pensée sauvage*. With agricultural civilizations, however, came world religions. Based on written texts, these by contrast developed a single-stranded but non-referential language—a doctrine of the divine order beyond the tangible world whose purest version was Platonism. For Gellner this change marks a momentous advance, ‘the first unification’ of cognition. For although it embodied less information about the real world than its predecessor, it generated the ideal of a logically related, orderly corpus of concepts that could in a subsequent epoch ‘flip over’ into the single-purpose referential language of modern science, capable of dispensing with the deity and rationally explaining the processes of nature.<sup>49</sup>

### Ambiguities of Cognition

In this schema, however, the slippage between knowledge and credence in the meaning of ‘cognition’ leads to an evident contradiction in the narrative logic itself. For Gellner treats the culture of the agrarian civilizations as if they did not also encompass major empirical advances in understanding and transforming nature, involving a notably higher—not lower—degree of referentiality than anything to be found in the foraging bands before them. In this confusion, sight is lost of the initiating argument of delayed returns itself. On the other hand, when Gellner’s account moves to the transition

<sup>49</sup> *Plough, Sword and Book*, pp. 79ff.

beyond agricultural societies, the emphasis reverts to cognition as actual knowledge again. The advent of Industria is interpreted in quasi-Weberian style as the triumph of a new rationality. In Gellner's more tightly focused version, it was growth of cognition which alone made possible growth of productivity in market economies. The original impulse came from the European Reformation, which promoted an instrumental and egalitarian inflexion of the local cosmology that sanctioned the pursuit of wealth while actually aiming at a puritan theocracy. It was then the failure of rule by the saints, in the Commonwealth epoch, that cleared the way for the unprecedented emancipation of cognitive enquiry that began with Descartes and culminated with Hume and Kant in the European Enlightenment. This intellectual revolution prepared a technological transformation for which the requisite economic motivations now existed. But for the Industrial Revolution to occur, a 'miraculous political and ideological balance of power' had to prevail in England, so that the traditional forces of the sword and the book did not block the path of the machine. Gellner lists some fifteen separate candidates for an explanation of this miracle, only to conclude—as the term itself implies—that it is well-nigh beyond rational reconstruction, an unfathomable 'series of accidents'.<sup>30</sup> The real work of explanation is thus carried by cognition, now understood in more exacting philosophical mode: not by production, which is released by such knowledge, nor by coercion or ideology, which simply perform the service of not getting in the way. Once a sharp critic of current culturalist doctrines of the primacy of the conceptual in the social, judged a facile idealism, Gellner here risks landing in a rarefied one: the *Dis-course on Method*, rather than Methodism, as turnkey to modern manufacture.

Gellner's enterprise ends with a series of tantalizing reflections on the present. In these, the tensions in his treatment of cognition as a historical force finally surface, as they come to form a substantive issue for his argument in their own right. Outside the West, in the Communist or Third World, the politics of coercion still may rule the roost—in some areas dominating the realm of production to an even greater degree than during Agraria. In the capitalist democracies, on the other hand, the acquisition of wealth has long been possible without the exercise of power; in the future, for the first time in history, power could perhaps become attainable without wealth. But here cognition and culture enter into direct conflict, as the successes of science fail to provide meaning or value for social or personal life, which inherently demand complex satisfactions of a kind its isolate goals can never yield. The result is typically the coexistence of a rationalized production with a lax, irrationalist culture of consumption and superstition—a 'rubber cage' of fictitious re-enchantment seemingly compatible with any amount of bureaucratic administration or industrial progress, confounding Weber's expectations. These are conditions in which the feverish pursuit of material goods still obtains. Yet material needs are by their nature relatively limited, and as poverty is absorbed could soon be saturated. At that point the symbolic substitutions of

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 132, 199.

consumption itself might become exhausted, leaving the necessities of production and the requirements of meaning entirely dissociated from each other. Cognition, knowing no such contradiction, would by contrast advance with undiminished, even accelerating momentum. In these circumstances, the future would be dominated by a question without precedent. What social forms might arise when the pervasive compulsions of work and force have lapsed, leaving knowledge alone face to face with itself? If cognition should extend to the capacity to mould—genetically or psychically—human nature itself? On this note of utopian trouble, *Plough, Sword and Book* effectively concludes. The import of its final term not only precedes and supervises, but outlasts the others.

Looking back, it seems doubtful if any country has produced an equivalent cluster of large-scaled theories of history in such a short span of time: as if British culture, so long a laggard or absentee in the field, now made up for it with a vengeance. Certain commonalities are evident in the results. Whether starting from problems of class in the West, or stimulated by discussions of state and society in the East, all of these bodies of work emerged in dialectical tension with Marxism—in different ways illustrating Gellner's observation that 'Marxism is the major sociological theory to have emerged in the nineteenth century. Its standing is confirmed by the fact that such a large proportion of non-Marxist thinkers continue to define their positions by reference to it.' For 'as most people must needs think against some kind of grid, even (or perhaps especially) those who do not accept the Marxist theory of history tend to lean upon its ideas when they wish to say what they do positively believe.'<sup>2</sup> But this relationship should not be exaggerated, or isolated. In each of the four cases, there have been major intellectual influences coming from outside the discipline of sociology, having nothing to do with historical materialism: existential and post-structuralist philosophy for Giddens, diffusionist archaeology and logistics for Mann, neo-contractarian political theory and evolutionary biology for Runciman, functionalist ethnology and empiricist epistemology for Gellner. These have their bearing on the specific preoccupations that distinguish them—the respective themes of the lay actor, of material infrastructures, of practical competition, of cognitive development. But these constructions also share a general architecture that derives its design from the confrontation with Marxism. Their central claim about the structure of human history is two-fold. Firstly, there is no primacy of economic causation to it: military-political and ideological-cultural determinations are of equivalent significance. None of these three has any universal privilege: different societies and different epochs exhibit different dominants, which have to be established case by case. Secondly, this permutation in rank of importance obeys no pattern: the procession of variant institutional hierarchies that makes up the record of human development is contingent—not a chapter, but an encyclopaedia of accidents. In their negative sense contentions like these have, of course, long formed part of the critique of historical materialism in the West. What is new here is their positive instrumentation into a full-scale

<sup>2</sup> *State and Society in Seven Thought*, p. 176.



*alternative* to historical materialism, worked through with commensurate reach and detail. In the years in which they became the bugbear of advanced opinion on the Continent, totalizations—of heroic magnitude—finally acquired *droit de cité* in Britain.

## New Directions in Anthropology

During the long period when British sociology remained a cramped and arid affair, British anthropology—so I had argued—flourished as a discipline. Principles of totality shunned at home could be projected abroad, into the investigation of tribal societies caught in the net of colonial rule, generating a remarkable tradition of empirical fieldwork and—mainly functionalist—social theory. What has happened in this zone in the past twenty years? The principal development has lain in the work of one thinker, whose character breaks the conventional bounds between anthropology and sociology—a division it expressly rejects—to form what is effectively a fifth great body of historical sociology. More empirical and topical in composition, comprising a brilliant necklace of particular studies, it is also more original in its research. There is one further difference that sets it apart. Here, historical materialism has been not the foil but the form of the direction taken by the work. Jack Goody was a member of the Marxist generation formed in the late thirties, a contemporary of Eric Hobsbawm and Raymond Williams in the Communist milieu at Cambridge. Trained in English literature, he did his anthropological field-work in Northern Ghana, at the time of the independence struggle, where—in contrast to the typical predecessor, linked to the district officer—he became a local member of the CPP.<sup>32</sup> After a set of distinguished monographs, he started to produce from 1968 onwards a series of far-reaching general studies, across a broad swathe of topics—many of them well outside the conventional purview of the anthropologist. The predominant British tradition of anthropology was particularist, and functionalist: focused essentially on single societies, and their synchronic integration. Breaking with this still active legacy, Goody's work took a deliberately 'macro-evolutionary' tack, systematically committed to historical problems of 'comparison and long-term change'.<sup>33</sup> But by the same token it also came to embody a powerful critique of the opposite French tradition, which was structuralist and universalist. No one has taken issue with Lévi-Strauss more effectively. Critical of any overvaluation of problems of meaning at the expense of those of explanation, Goody has also pointedly rejected the French anthropologist's oscillation between a 'diffuse relativism and sentimental egalitarianism' that stresses the fundamental identity of the operations of the human mind, and a crude 'bimodalism' that constructs a contrast between 'neolithic' and 'modern' forms of science as the fundamental dichotomy of human history.<sup>34</sup> Rejection of all 'Great Divide' theories of social development, a consistent

<sup>32</sup> See *Production and Reproduction*, Cambridge 1976, p. ix.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. i.

<sup>34</sup> *The Domestication of The Savage Mind*, Cambridge 1977, pp. 2–8; J. Goody and I. Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', in J. Goody, ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge 1968, p. 67.

feature of Goody's writing, naturally affects versions such as that of Gellner (his successor at Cambridge) too.

Goody's relationship to Marxism has, at the same time, always been a subtle and critical one. His work extends well beyond its classical range of interests, and recasts many of its customary emphases in doing so. Determination of social life in the last instance by forms of economic livelihood has remained his point of departure. But the destination of his research has been modes of reproduction, destruction and communication, as much as of production itself. Family, warfare and writing are among its leading themes. Military-political and cultural-ideological processes have as much focus as in the sociology of power; but the domestic-demographic regimes it neglects are included as well. A more wide-ranging curiosity about the 'ideal' dimensions of history than has been general in Marxism is controlled by a firmer attention to its 'material'—physical or technical—conditions. The short book Goody published in 1971, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa*, in some ways the pivot of his oeuvre, is a signal example. Its starting-point is a critique of Eurocentric ascriptions of feudalism to sub-Saharan Africa—not least Marxist ones. In reality, Goody argued, feudalism never took root there because the ecological, demographic and technical conditions for it were absent. By comparison with most of Eurasia, land was abundant, but soil poor and population scarce. The Bronze Age invention of the plough never spread south of the Sahara, nor the wheel: hence there was no animal traction, wind or water-power, nor irrigation. Since people rather than land were in short supply, chiefly powers were more directly exercised over the former—dependent labour taking the form of slavery rather than serfdom, in a milieu where rights over the soil were less individualized than in most of Europe. The only area of exception was Ethiopia, which significantly knew both plough and serf-based landlordism. Horses, for their part, never penetrated south of the Sudd marshes in the Sudan, their path blocked by tse-tse fly and forest—preventing major investment in warfare, among acephalous societies whose weapons were the bow and arrow. Where they did arrive, in the circum-Saharan belt, cavalry generated the 'mass dynasties' of the savannah, while the later importation of guns produced the centralized forest autocracies of the West African coast. Contrasting political orders were thus founded on differences in the means of destruction, rather than of production.

### Eurasia and Africa

These findings on agriculture and war subsequently flowed into a much broader comparative enquiry. Most macro-historical investigation has traditionally worked through contrasts between European and Asian experience. Goody's vantage-point in Africa allowed him to 'triangulate' this venerable dualism, yielding novel results that often shifted the axis of contrast to one between Eurasia as a single zone, and Sub-Sahara. In *Production and Reproduction* (1977), he developed a striking typology of inheritance and dowry systems as determinants of conjugal forms, that essentially picked out two configurations. In Africa, only men could inherit and there were no dowries; hence genuine

polygyny was widespread, and there was little or no practice of concubinage. In Europe and Asia, on the other hand, there was 'divergent devolution': both sexes could inherit or receive property, so the trend was always towards monogamy, with concubinage mainly as an heir-producing insurance. Lateral inheritance (priority of brothers over sons) was common in Africa, vertical all but universal in Europe. This bifurcation of inheritance and therefore marriage patterns, Goody suggested, was itself determined by the economic and socio-political constellation of each zone: plough agriculture, pronounced class division, more complex states in Eurasia, as opposed to hoe agriculture, more fluid social differentiation and less developed political authority in Sub-Saharan. Culturally, he terms this a difference between 'hierarchical' and 'hieratic' societies—that is, those where stratification of classes, castes or estates gives rise to separate sub-cultures for each, and those where such cultural laddering is minimal, even where state and social inequality subsist. In Africa, traditional custom actually promoted marriage between status groups, and rulers preferred commoner wives; whereas Eurasian societies typically banned such unions, the general rule being that 'like had to marry like'.

In *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1981), Goody explored a further significant dimension of this contrast. The general argument of the book is a riposte to Lévi-Strauss's formalization of culinary systems as binary codes translating the unconscious structure of societies into so many recipes. Criticizing the abstraction of this procedure from the realities of either biology or history, as well as its preoccupation with meaning dissociated from cause, Goody proposed instead a comparative social explanation of major variations in the preparation of food across the world, in terms of the patterns of local economic production and social differentiation. The emergence of 'cuisine' proper—the separation of high and low, central and regional, cooking—is traced to the emergence of class distance and court cultures in Eurasia. In pre-colonial Africa, the only society where something like it appeared was Amhara. Elsewhere, there was a uniform demotic cooking, with a relatively limited range of ingredients: low-status wives in high-status households stabilizing the general norm. The European and North American industrialization of food in the 19th century transformed all these conditions, creating new mixed diets everywhere, in Northern Ghana as much as Northern England, closing consumption gaps in the more advanced countries and opening them in the more peripheral. The symbolism of gastronomy is not discounted; but it is not to be over-interpreted either, in 'uncheckable speculation'.<sup>25</sup> The persistence of specific dishes in a given culture may often reflect their lack of importance for society as a whole, rather than their expression of it—simply providing existential continuity in epochs of great change. Food is above all humanity's primary means of subsistence, rather than of self-expression: it calls quite particularly for a materialist analysis of the whole cycle of its production, preparation and consumption.

Goody's research next moved from broad contrasts between Africa and Eurasia, to one major divergence within the Eurasian zone itself.

From Late Antiquity onwards, the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean exhibited quite different matrimonial patterns. 'Close' marriages, especially between first cousins, characterized the Arab South, whereas they were forbidden in the Christian North, a contrast between endogamous and exogamous systems that had not existed in Classical times. Neither Roman, nor for that matter Biblical, law had proscribed close marriage, just as they had also allowed concubinage, divorce and adoption. Why then, starting at the end of the 4th century and culminating in the 11th century, did the Catholic Church not only ban marriage between cousins but steadily multiply the 'prohibited degrees' of consanguinity for conjugal partners? The conventional answer had been that it was the new Christian sexual morality which sought to stamp out close marriages as tainted with incest, concubinage and divorce as threats to fidelity. Pointing out that adoption, without any such carnal dimension, was also forbidden, Goody argued that the real drive behind the Church's proscriptions was not so much ethical as economic. What all the practices that fell under its veto shared was their role as 'strategies of heirship', designed to keep property within the family. Blockage of these devices increased the chances of individuals dying heirless, and so of them making bequests of their property to the Church—which, for its part, conversely enforced celibacy on its priests, to guard against private appropriation of clerical wealth. The result was an accumulation of church lands, which came to account for about a third of the cultivated area of France by the Merovingian period. Yet if the dynamic of this process was essentially economic, it had major affective consequences: by emphasizing in its own interests mutual consent in marriage, at the expense of the secular code of parental permission, the Church unintentionally fostered ideals of conjugal equality and sympathy that became part of the cultural heritage of modern Europe.

### The Breakthrough to Literacy

Goody's contributions to the comparative sociology of environment and warfare, class and gastronomy, family and property, represent a unique cluster in their own right. But the most influential of all the strands in his work has certainly been his exploration of the impact of writing in the history of human development. His background in English studies was clearly of importance for this line of enquiry—his first essay on the subject was co-authored with Ian Watt. The texts in *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (1968) take the spread of the principles of the Semitic syllabary in the second millennium BC as 'the supreme example of cultural diffusion'—all known alphabets through Eurasia and Africa deriving from it—but insist that the cultural effects of this technical breakthrough were determined by the social context in which it became available. Writing, whether alphabetic or ideographic, permitted no more than a very restricted literacy where religious tradition (India) or political exclusion (China) controlled its usage. Only in Greece did a truly extended literate culture emerge, among the citizenry of the *polis*; and, however much Socrates or Plato might attack writing, it was this that permitted the unique Greek achievements in epistemology and taxonomy.

When he came to treat the subject at full tilt a decade later, Goody was critical of what he evidently felt was a conventional element in this last emphasis. In form, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977) is a sustained critique of Lévi-Strauss's dichotomy between a 'science of the concrete' concerned to classify the 'sensible' world, characteristic of the savage mind, and a 'science of the abstract' designed to explain an 'intelligible' world, peculiar to the modern mind: a search for order dominating the one, the pursuit of security the other. For Goody, by contrast, pragmatic needs and categoric classifications are not alternatives but complements, at every stage of social development. It is the quest for material security that normally dominates actors, for inescapable reasons, but there is never a time when this can be satisfied without an intellectual order. The anthropologist from an English university and the adolescent from a Ghanaian tribe do not approach 'the physical world from opposite ends'—'the boy brought up as a *bricoleur* becomes an engineer. He has his difficulties, but they do not lie at the level of an overall opposition between wild and domesticated minds.'<sup>56</sup> Lévi-Strauss's bi-modalism, built around a stark division of human intelligence into neolithic and modern forms, is empirically incompatible with the record of crucial social inventions, many of which predated neolithic times (speech, tools, cooking, weaponry), while others lay between them and modern times (metallurgy, wheel, writing). But it is also, Goody argued, theoretically vacant, since it merely advances a contrast without accounting for it. His own strategy would be to relate ascertainable differences in mentality to historical changes in modes of communication, above all the introduction of various forms of writing.

The central transformation brought by the invention of writing was the ability to preserve speech over time and space, so that intellectual life was no longer constrained by problems of memory storage, but could develop cumulatively across the process of transcription. Pre-literate societies, contrary to conventional belief, could produce sceptics—by no means unknown in the simplest tribal communities; but scepticism as a critical tradition could only emerge once there existed the means to preserve and transmit sceptical thoughts. Without literacy, no philosophy. The gains of writing, however, long predated the Semitic syllabary or Greek alphabet. Cuneiform inscriptions, overwhelmingly administrative and economic in character, pioneered the vital device of the list—inventorial, chronological, or lexical. These acted as powerful stimuli to the growth of observational sciences, the activity of early historians (of Lévi-Strauss's dictum that there is no history without dates, Goody remarks that it would truer to say: without archives), and the rationalization of language itself. Above all, the possibility of 'backward scanning' permitted the cumulative development of arts and sciences. None of these developments was independent of social structure, but the general historical importance of such innovations can be seen from the fact that scientific advances regularly followed major changes in the means of communication, whether with the discovery of writing in Mesopotamia, the alphabet in Greece, or printing in Western Europe.

---

<sup>56</sup> *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, pp. 8–9.

Goody's most recent work, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (1986), enlarges his focus into a survey of the consequences of early literacy for the principal institutional complexes of society—taking among his main fields of contrast the Ancient Near East and West Africa. The advent of writing everywhere generated its own specialists, scribes whose skills powerfully promoted the structural differentiation of each of the major organizational orders. Religion acquired priesthoods, supported by temples and monasteries—where the pre-literate languages of Africa lack even any concept of it as a phenomenon distinct from social life at large. Universal creeds, typically though not invariably oriented towards conversion, could then emerge because of the decontextualization of belief through sacred texts. States acquired bureaucracies, capable of storing information, relaying instructions, computing taxation, conducting diplomatic negotiations—the 'tyranny of distance' yielding to 'tyranny over big distances'. Property and trade acquired the instruments of alienation and credit, the devices of book-keeping and banking. Law acquired new authority and regularity, the inscription of edicts and the record of courts replacing informal custom and sanction. All of these changes brought with them greater social inequality. But although the immediate impact of writing was typically accompanied by an increase of stratification, its long-term dynamic proved—very gradually—egalitarian, as literacy spread and dissent became cumutable. Two lessons stand out in any study of this whole process. Conventional stage theories of history, most of them Eurocentric in bias, typically impose artificial demarcations on the societal forms of the past—as if they were homogeneous units whose transformation could only occur through inner contradiction and scission. But in reality, empirical societies are nearly always a mixture of forms, and change in them is more usually the result of an expansion of one of them at the expense of others, so that historical development proceeds not by stages but by overlaps. In these, the technologies of the intellect—as distinct from the epiphanies of cognition—play a central role, determining 'what we can do with our minds, and what our minds can do with us'.<sup>57</sup> To acknowledge this role, Goody concludes, is necessarily to shift some of the weight Marxists have traditionally put on the means and relations of production to the means and relations of communication.

(to be concluded)

---

<sup>57</sup> *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, p. 160.

NEW FROM PRINCETON

## Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society

*Ronald Inglehart*

"After some years of neglect, the study of culture is reappearing as an important topic in social science. Professor Inglehart's wide-ranging new book is the most important exposition and extension of the political culture approach in nearly a quarter century, and it will make a powerful contribution to the emerging debate."

—Robert D. Putnam, *Harvard University*

Paper: \$16.95 ISBN 0-691-02296-8

Cloth: \$49.50 ISBN 0-691-07786-X

## Crisis Amid Plenty

The Politics of Soviet Energy  
under Brezhnev and Gorbachev

*Thane Gustafson*

"This book is easily the best sustained case study of policy-making during the Brezhnev era that exists in the Western literature, and it ranks with the very best such case studies for all periods of Soviet history. Its special value lies in the careful and balanced attention the author gives to all important dimensions of the policy process: not just the political, but the physical, technological, intellectual, and bureaucratic dimensions as well."

—Peter Hauslohner, *Yale University*

Cloth: \$29.95 ISBN 0-691-07835-1

## Cultural Disenchantments

Worker Peasantries in Northeast Italy

*Douglas R. Holmes*

Douglas Holmes develops the concept of peasant-worker society to analyze a kind of social formation that has until now gone largely unrecognized and unstudied. His book portrays the dissonant crosscurrents created at the interface of urban industrial and rural peasant spheres. Examining the region of Friuli in northeast Italy, it shows how wage labor was adopted by country folk who maintained ties to small-scale cultivation and indigenous traditions.

Paper: \$14.95 ISBN 0-691-02849-4

Cloth: \$40.00 ISBN 0-691-09448-9



PRICES ARE IN U.S. DOLLARS • ORDER FROM YOUR BOOKSELLER OR FROM

**Princeton University Press**

ORDER DEPT., 3175 PRINCETON PIKE, • LAWRENCEVILLE, NJ 08648 U.S.A.

# *Radical Books* **FROM CAMBRIDGE**

## **Alternatives to Capitalism**

Edited by **JON ELSTER** and  
**KARL O. MOENE**

The essays in this provocative new collection survey and assess institutional arrangements as potential alternatives to capitalism as it stands today.

£7.95 net Paperback 0 521 37815 X  
144 pp

*Studies in Marxism and Social Theory*

## **Democratic Theory and Socialism**

**FRANK CUNNINGHAM**

'This book is ample demonstration of the incisive and lucid political thinking there is in the anglo-saxon tradition.'

Jean Robelin, *Actuel Marx*

£11.95 net Paperback 0 521 33578 7  
375 pp

## **Marx's Lost Aesthetic**

Karl Marx and the Visual Arts

**MARGARET A. ROSE**

- Winner of the  
Isaac Deutscher Prize

'Rose's book . . . help(s) to explain a paradox: and that is how many contemporary Marxist readings of art (eg John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*) mirror the anti-aesthetic high-tec approach of our present Tory government . . .'

*The Guardian*

£9.95 net Paperback 0 521 36979 7  
224 pp.

*Now in paperback*

## **The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas**

Reason, Justice and Modernity

**STEPHEN K. WHITE**

A clear and accessible introduction to one of the world's foremost philosophers and political theorists. This is the first full-length study of the new themes emergent in Habermas' mature work.

£8.95 net Paperback 0 521 38959 3  
202 pp.

*Radical Books* promotional material: carrier bags and posters  
Contact Catherine Max at the address below



**Cambridge**  
**University Press**

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK



## Narrative, Geography and Interpretation

Whenever a great intellectual and moral presence like Raymond Williams suddenly disappears from his habitual place among us it is natural at first to restore him by various ceremonies and activities of commemoration.\* The sense of loss and bereavement that was felt immediately after Williams's death in 1988 has been an instigation not only for public observances of grief and respect but also for our many private acts of recollection and retrospective admiration. I knew him mainly from his immensely grand but directly appealing *oeuvre*. Certainly the handful of times that I had met him came to mind with all sorts of poignant emphases as, along with many others, I reconstructed from our intermittent meetings the vital personality of his engaging and thoughtful human presence. He was someone many of us listened to—the sound patterns of his direct communication to audiences as speaker, conversationalist and lecturer are discernible in everything he wrote—and from whom all of us quite literally learned a great deal of what is important about modern Western culture.

In time, however, vivid recollections of the man we miss are evident as anchored in something deeper and more reliable than personal memory. For of all the great critics of the twentieth century Raymond Williams is, in my opinion, the most abiding, the most organically grounded in the profound and sustaining rhythms of human life. And as the actual date of his death slowly recedes one finds oneself taking stock of what in the solid foundations of social life his work depends on so finely, so scrupulously, so resolutely. Who more than he rooted his observations and analyses of English literature in the actual lived life not just of poets, novelists and dramatists but of city and country folk, workers, families, peasants, gentry, young people, adventurers, pamphleteers, teachers, children, technicians, policemen, and bureaucrats? And who more than Williams nourished his literary work with the generative and regenerative processes by which human life produces itself locally, nationally, regionally?

### Text and Community

I would like to begin by elucidating the connection in Raymond Williams's work between the literary text and the lived life of knowable social groups—a connection brilliantly refined and mapped in *The Country and the City*—and then go on to develop and otherwise to rediscover it in one major instance not discussed by Williams. Just as Williams, when he is read, enables us to move directly beyond what he called the ideological capture of the text and into the life of communities, so too does his work posthumously and over time enable us to perceive the generous perspectives on other literatures and societies afforded and made possible by his approach to English literature and society.

In his books Williams was powerfully focused on the British Isles, so much so that he appeared to be, as in his own description of Cobbett returning to England in 1801, 'in close contact with the country and political system' that so many other English men and women had only idealized. *The Country and the City* gets much of its force from its direct and unflinching look at the land itself, the struggles to possess it, to speak on its behalf, to build or colonize on it and in its name, to dispossess, ruin, maim and distort the lives of many, all in the cause of land. Property, as Williams demonstrates with extraordinary skill, authorizes schemes, establishes discourses, founds ideologies, many of them leading back to the earth, 'England's green and pleasant land' for some, 'the heart of an immense darkness' for others. In Williams's dialectical vision of it English culture was not a single stable object to be venerated and celebrated, but rather a remarkably varied set of structures deriving from the land, over and on which rights and ideas dispute each other, as also of course do classes and individuals. Thus the country-house poems of the 17th century are taken back by Williams to the dispossession of peasants and the programmatic manufacture of a scene from which only artificial serenity and grace have not been excluded.

---

\* This article is the text of the Raymond Williams Memorial Lecture, delivered in London on 10 October 1989.

The conception of Britain that underpins Williams's work is in a quite radical sense a geographical one, geography understood here as the science of the earth, its physical, political, historical, social and ideological features contributing each in its own way to the culture of which Williams was so distinguished a critic and participant. And exactly because Williams was such a remarkable writer on that complex of nations to which he belonged we can now retrospectively begin to discern all around his Britain, those other nations of the world without which any true geography of the historical adventure of mankind would be incomplete. There is a paradox here that we should not mute. Because Williams's Anglocentrism is so pronounced and stubborn a theme in his work, *because* of that we can distinguish and differentiate the other ethnocentrisms with which his work in geographical and historical terms interacts contrapuntally.

Consider the possibilities now offered to Anglophone studies, to take an example very near at hand. There are the colonial relationships, first of all, between the Britain of the seventeenth through twentieth centuries, and places like Ireland, Africa, India, the Caribbean, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. The kind of interpretation offered by Williams allows for the emergence of various structures of feeling involving those places, structures fashioned from within Britain as the imperial, metropolitan centre. The themes of emigration and banishment in the colonies, the relationship between the novel's narrative form as realized in *Robinson Crusoe* and the colonial expansion of Britain, the whole idea of imperial domination and with it the specific issues of subject races, racial types, indirect rule, national destiny as intrinsic to the late nineteenth and twentieth-century cultural archive of Britain: these major topics surely emerge from the reconsiderations of English literature begun by Williams and continued by many of his able students. Yet, secondly, there is also the vast and burgeoning literature of the former colonies, in which a sustained reaction and response to the metropolitan literature of the British centre plays a very important decolonizing role. Think of the importance of *The Tempest* to Caribbean writers, or of Kipling to Indian writers, of Conrad to Africans. What used to be the citadel of an English literature composed of great stonelike slabs, the masterpieces that constitute the canon or great tradition, has been transformed into sites of intersection, where class, racial and gender interests form not only the actual texts but the reading of texts in highly determinate ways, many of which we are only just beginning to understand.

In the late twentieth century, therefore, 'English' has become not just the linguistic possession of one people but a world language, distending beyond recognition the tidy and relatively discrete map of Britain on which such fields as English studies have always been based. For not only do we have to take account of the particular North American extensions of 'English' but we must also, as Williams so often did in both his early and late research, take account of the new media networks, the technological revolution in communications, and the remarkable multi-national economic and political schemes that have re-distributed the old imperial patterns in alarmingly familiar

contemporary ensembles. Yet despite its scope and richness, the English map that secured the landscape from local to international horizons has always had other national competitors. France, Germany, Russia, Holland, Belgium during the nineteenth century, and today such intercontinental configurations as Islam, Japan, the Third World vie with each other to mobilize as well as organize numerous cultural practices that are often adversarial and defensive. If one adds to this mix the radical passions evoked by what I can only call the nativist predilection, in which Englishness and Frenchness jostle *négritude*, the Judeo-Christian tradition, and many of the fundamentalist essences more and more regularly invoked by disadvantaged, or disenfranchised groups at one end, and at the other end, by ruling elites badly in need of foreign devils for the conduct of national policy, we will get a startlingly dramatic sense of the insistent identities clamouring for notice everywhere we look.

### Post-War World Culture

To pierce this welter in search of something comparable to and as certain as England's geography is a task of considerable difficulty. But it is a task provoked by the example of Raymond Williams, whose unmatched explorations of England and its various conflicting cultures raise the question of how and *where* one might proceed in that way today if (a) one is not to be limited to England and (b) the genuinely internationalist dimensions of the changes in post-war world culture are taken seriously. Besides—if I may be allowed a personal confession—the power of Williams's work is intrinsically at one with its rootedness and even its insularity, qualities that stimulate in the variously unhoused and rootless energies of people like myself—by origin un-English, un-European, un-Western—a combination of admiring regard and puzzled envy. What, we say to ourselves, is there in it for us, given that we can emulate neither his belongingness nor his native vision? How does Williams's work in and about England help us to address some of the related aesthetic, political and cultural problematics that we can find in locales and texts far less English and European than Williams's? And how, in their own way, do these other formations depend no less on a concrete geography than does, say, *The Country and the City*?

The attractive and relatively logical alternative is to cross the Channel and look at writing that engages Britain's historical imperial rival, metropolitan France, whose postwar struggle over its North African colonies surely makes up one of the most compelling issues in French life and letters. In trying to formulate a combination of comparison and contrast with Williams's work about contemporary England, one name and one *oeuvre* has seemed to me especially significant, that of Albert Camus and his several narratives set in, but only occasionally about, Algeria. Why Camus is important in the ugly colonial turbulence of France's decolonizing travail is fairly obvious, but what makes him acutely interesting is his retrospective relationship with George Orwell, who was of course a figure given important and controversial attention by Williams. Like Orwell Camus became a well-known writer around issues highlighted in the thirties and forties: fascism,

the Spanish Civil War, resistance to the fascist onslaught, issues of poverty and social injustice treated from within the discourse of socialism, the relationship between writers and politics, the role of the intellectual. Both were famous for the clarity and plainness of their style—we should recall Roland Barthes's description of Camus's style in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (1951) as *écriture blanche*—as well as the unaffected clarity of their political formulations. Both also made the transformation from the debates of the thirties and forties to the period of the Cold War with less than happy results. Both, in short, are posthumously interesting because of narratives they wrote which now seem to be about a situation that on closer inspection seems really to be another and quite different one. Orwell's fictional examinations of British socialism have taken on almost prophetic quality (if you like them, symptomatic if you don't) in the domain of Cold War polemic; Camus's narratives of resistance and existential confrontation, which had once seemed to typify standing up both to mortality and to Nazism during the Occupation, can be read as part of the bitter debate about colonialism.

There are more political and cultural connections between them that I would like to dwell on a moment longer. Despite Williams's rather powerful critique of Orwell's social vision, Orwell is regularly claimed by intellectuals on the Left and Right because of his political positions as well as his human virtue. Was he a neo-conservative in advance of his time as Norman Podhoretz claims, or was he, as Christopher Hitchens more persuasively argues, really a hero of the Left? Camus is today somewhat less available to Anglo-American concerns, but he has begun turning up as critic, political moralist, admirable novelist in recent discussions of terrorism and colonialism. The striking parallel between Camus and Orwell is that both men have attained the status of exemplary figures of their respective cultures, figures whose significance derives from but nevertheless seems to transcend the immediate force of their native context. The note is perfectly struck near the end of Conor Cruise O'Brien's brilliant demystification of Camus, in a book that in many ways resembles (and belongs to the same series as) Raymond Williams's *Modern Masters* study of Orwell. O'Brien says:

Probably no European writer of his time left so deep a mark on the imagination and, at the same time, on the moral and political consciousness of his own generation and of the next. He was intensely European because he belonged to the frontier of Europe and was aware of a threat. The threat also beckoned to him. He refused, but not without a struggle.

No other writer, not even Conrad, is more representative of the Western consciousness and conscience in relation to the non-Western world. The inner drama of his work is the development of this relation, under increasing pressure and in increasing anguish.<sup>1</sup>

### 'Western Consciousness'

Having shrewdly and even mercilessly exposed the connections between Camus's most famous novels and the colonial situation in

---

<sup>1</sup> Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Albert Camus*, New York 1970, p. 103.

Algeria, O'Brien lets him off the hook at the end: Camus as representative of 'Western' consciousness and conscience, along with Conrad. There is even a subtle act of transcendence in O'Brien's notion of Camus as belonging 'to the frontier of Europe', whereas in fact anyone who knows anything about France, Algeria and Camus's relationship with the North African colony—O'Brien is certainly one of the ones who know a lot—would not characterize the essence of the colonial tie as one between the European mainland and its frontier. Similarly Conrad and Camus are not merely representatives of so relatively weightless a thing as 'Western consciousness' but rather of Western dominance in the non-European world. Conrad makes the abstract point with unerring power in his essay 'Geography and Some Explorers'. He celebrates British exploration of the Arctic in the first two-thirds of the essay and then concludes with an example of his own 'militant geography', the way, he says, by 'putting my finger on a spot in the very middle of the then white heart of Africa, I declared that some day I would go there.'<sup>2</sup> Later of course he does go there, and rehabilitates the gesture in *Heart of Darkness*. The point about the Western colonialism that O'Brien and Conrad are at such pains to describe is, first, that it is a penetration *beyond* the European frontier and *into* the heart of another geographical entity, and second, that it is specific not to an ahistorical 'Western consciousness in relation to the non-Western world'—most African or Indian natives considered their burdens as having less to do with 'Western consciousness' than with concrete French, British or Belgian colonial practices like slavery, land expropriations, murderous military campaigns, etc.—but to a whole laboriously constructed relationship by which France and Britain identified themselves as 'the West' while subservient lesser peoples were relegated to the status of a largely undeveloped and inert 'non-Western world'.<sup>3</sup>

The quite considerable elision and compression in O'Brien's otherwise tough-minded analysis of Camus comes in fact as O'Brien deals with Camus as individual artist, anguished over the difficult choices he must face. Unlike Sartre and Jeanson, who were right but for whom, according to O'Brien, a correct choice of sides during the Algerian war was comparatively easy, Camus was born and brought up in Algeria; his family remained there after he began to live in France, and his involvement in the struggle with the FLN seemed to him to be a matter of life and death. One can certainly agree with this much of O'Brien's claim. What is less easy to accept is how Camus's difficulties are collectively elevated by O'Brien to the symbolic rank of 'Western consciousness', that is, of a receptacle emptied of all but its capacity for sentience and reflection.

O'Brien further rescues Camus from the embarrassing situation he had put him in earlier in the book by stressing the privileged

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Last Essays*, ed. Richard Curle, London 1926, pp. 10–17.

<sup>3</sup> The later O'Brien, with views noticeably like these and different from the gist of his book on Camus, has made no secret of his antipathy for the lesser peoples of the 'Third World'. See his extended disagreement with Said in *Salamagrande* 70–71, Spring/Summer 1986.

quality of his individual experience. With this tactic we are also likely to have some sympathy. Whatever the unfortunate collective nature of French *colon* behaviour in Algeria, there is no reason at all to burden Camus with it, he a writer whose entirely French upbringing in Algeria (well described in the Herbert Lottman biography<sup>4</sup>) did not prevent him from producing a famous pre-war report on the miseries of the place, most of them due to French colonialism.<sup>5</sup> O'Brien, and indeed anyone who reads Camus's fiction, is understandably susceptible to his quandaries, those of a moral man in an immoral situation. But Camus's focus is not on the whole of Algeria but on the predicament of the individual in a social setting: this is as true of *L'Étranger* as it is of *The Plague* and *The Fall*. What Camus evidently prizes is self-recognition, that combination of disillusioned maturity and moral steadfastness in the face of a bad situation.

### Questions of Method

Here, however, a set of serious methodological points needs to be raised. The first is to question and deconstruct Camus's choice of geographical setting for *L'Étranger* (1942), *The Plague* (1947), and his extremely interesting group of short stories collected under the title *Exile and the Kingdom* (1957). Why was Algeria a setting for narratives whose main reference (in the case of the first two) has always been construed as being France generally, and more particularly, France under the Nazi Occupation? O'Brien goes further than most in noting that the choice is not an innocent one, that much in the tales (e.g. Meursault's trial) is either a surreptitious or unconscious justification of French rule or an ideological attempt to prettify it.<sup>6</sup> But in trying with perfect justification to establish a continuity between Camus as an individual artist and French colonialism in Algeria, we need to ask whether or not Camus's narratives themselves are connected to, and derive advantages from, earlier and more overtly imperial French narratives of Algeria. Only in widening the historical perspective from Camus as an attractively solitary writer in the 1940s and '50s to the century-old French presence in Algeria would it be possible to understand not just the form and ideological meaning of Camus's narratives, but also the degree to which his work further inflects, refers to, and in many ways consolidates and otherwise renders more precise the nature of the French enterprise there.

A second methodological point concerns the type of evidence necessary for this wider optic. There is also the related question of who does the interpreting. A European critic of historical bent is very likely to see Camus as representing a tragically immobilized French consciousness of the *European* crisis near one of its great watersheds; after all, independence came in 1962 and although Camus seemed to have regarded *colon* implantations as rescuable and extendable past

<sup>4</sup> Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography*, New York 1979. Camus's actual behaviour in Algeria during the colonial war is best chronicled in Yves Courrière's *La Guerre d'Algérie II: Le temps des léopards*, Paris 1969.

<sup>5</sup> 'Misère de la Kabylie' (1939), in Camus, *Essais*, Paris 1965.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, op. cit., pp. 22-28.

1960 (the year of his death), he was quite simply wrong on historical grounds, since the French did in fact cede possession of Algeria a mere two years later. Insofar as his work clearly alludes to contemporary Algeria, Camus's general concern was the actual state of Franco-Algerian affairs, and not their history or dramatic changes in their long-term destiny. Yet to an Algerian, 1962 would more likely be seen as the end of one long and grossly unhappy epoch in Algerian history, and the triumphant beginning of an entirely new phase. A correlative way of interpreting Camus's novels, therefore, would be to see them as interventions in the history of French efforts at being and staying in Algeria rather than as novels whose chief value is that they tell us something about their author's state of mind. Moreover, Camus's incorporations of and assumptions about Algerian history would have to be compared with revisionist histories of the period written by Algerians *after* independence. For it would be correct to regard Camus's work as affiliated historically both with the French colonial venture itself (since everything he wrote assumes it as immutably given) and with outright opposition to Algerian independence. What an Algerian perspective might afford is a vision necessarily unblocking and releasing things either hidden or denied by Camus.

Lastly, there is a crucial methodological value in detail, patience, insistence with regard to Camus's highly compressed texts written in French for a metropolitan audience. The tendency is too often for readers rapidly to associate Camus's novels principally with French novels about France, not only because of their language and the forms they seem to take over from noble antecedents like *Adolphe* and *Trois Contes*, but because Camus's choice of Algeria seems incidental to the pressing moral material at hand. Almost half a century after their appearance, his novels are thus readily transmuted into parables of the human condition. True, Meursault kills an Arab but this Arab is not named and seems to be without a history, let alone a mother and father; true, Arabs die of plague in Oran but they are not named either, whereas Rieux and Tarrou are pushed very far forward in the action. So, we are likely to say (as, for instance, readers of Ben Jonson's poems are likely to say before reading *The Country and the City*) one ought to read the texts for the richness of what is there not for what, if anything, has been excluded. But I would insist, to the contrary and against the grain, that what is mainly in Camus's novels is what they appear to have been cleared of—that is, the detail of that very distinctly French conquest begun in 1830 and continuing into the period of Camus's life and into the composition of his texts themselves.

### The Political Geography of Algeria

This restorative interpretation is not meant vindictively. Nor do I intend after the fact to *blame* Camus for hiding things about Algeria in his fiction that, for example, in the various pieces collected in the *Chroniques algériennes* he was at pains to explain laboriously. What I want to do is to let Camus's fiction emerge as an element in the methodically constructed French political geography of Algeria that took many generations to complete, the better to see his work as providing for an arresting summary account of the political as well as



interpretive contest to represent, inhabit and possess the territory itself.

I shall use as *locus classicus* an episode near the end of *The Adulterous Woman* when Janine, the protagonist, leaves her husband's bedside during a sleepless night in a small hotel in the Algerian countryside. A formerly promising law student, he has become a travelling salesman; after a long and tiring bus journey the couple finally arrive at their destination where he makes the rounds of his various Arab clients. During the journey Janine has been impressed with the silent passivity and incomprehensibility of the native Algerians; their presence seems like a barely evident natural fact, taken scant notice of by her in her emotional trouble. When she leaves the hotel and her sleeping husband, Janine encounters the night watchman who speaks to her in Arabic, a language she appears not to understand. The climax of the story is a remarkable, almost pantheistic communion between Janine, the sky and the desert. Clearly, I think, Camus's intention is to present the relationship between woman and geography in sexual terms, that is, as an alternative to her now nearly dead relationship with her husband; hence the adultery referred to in the story's title. The relevant passage is worth quoting:

She was turning with them [the drifting stars in a sky, Camus says, that was 'moving in a sort of slow gyration'], and the apparently stationary progress little by little identified her with the core of her being, where cold and desire were now vying with each other. Before her the stars were falling one by one and being snuffed out among the stones of the desert, and each time Janine opened a little more to the night. Breathing deeply, she forgot the cold, the dead weight of others, the craziness or stuffiness of life, the long anguish of living and dying [*le poids des êtres, la vie démentie ou figée, la longue anguïsse de vivre et de mourir*]. After so many years of mad, aimless fleeing from fear, she had come to a stop at last. At the same time, she seemed to recover her roots and the sap again rose in her against the parapet as she strained toward the moving sky; she was merely waiting for her fluttering heart to calm down and establish silence within her. The last stars of the constellations dropped their clusters a little lower on unbearable gentleness, the water of night began to fill Janine, drowned the cold, rose gradually from the hidden core of her being, rising up even to her mouth full of moans [*l'eau de la nuit . . . monta peu à peu du centre obscur de son être et déborda en flots ininterrompus jusqu'à sa bouche pleine de gémissements*]. The next moment, the whole sky stretched over her, fallen on her back on the cold earth.<sup>7</sup>

The effect intended is that of a moment out of time in which Janine escapes the sordid narrative of her present life and enters the kingdom of the collection's title; or as Camus put it in a note he wanted to insert in subsequent editions of the collection, 'to the kingdom [which] coincides with a free and unvarnished life that we have to rediscover in order to be finally reborn.'<sup>8</sup> Thus her past and present drop away from her, as does the actuality of all other beings (*le poids des êtres*, symptomatically mistranslated as 'the dead weight of other people' by Justin O'Brien). In this passage therefore Janine 'comes to

<sup>7</sup> Camus, *Exile and the Kingdom*, New York 1958, pp. 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Camus, *Essais*, p. 2039.

a stop at last', motionless, fecund, ready for communion with this particular piece of sky and desert in which, echoing Camus's explanatory note designed as a later elucidation of the six stories, the woman—*pié noir* and *colon*—discovers her roots. What her real identity is or may be is judged later in the passage when she achieves what is an unmistakably sexual climax: Camus speaks here of the '*centre obscur de son être*', which suggests both her own sense of obscurity and ignorance, and Camus's as well. The point seems to be that her specific history as a Frenchwoman in Algeria does not matter, for she has achieved an immediate and direct access to that particular earth and sky.

With one exception—a garrulous and unassuming parable of Parisian artistic life—each of the stories in *Exile and the Kingdom* deals with the exile of people with a specific non-European history (four tales are set in Algeria, one each in Paris and in Brazil) which is revealed to be deeply, even threateningly unpleasant, and with the precariousness of trying to achieve a moment of rest, idyllic detachment, poetic self-realization. Only by analogy with what takes place in the Brazilian story, in which through sacrifice and commitment a European is received as a substitute for a dead native in the circle of intimacy by other natives, is there any suggestion that Camus allowed himself to believe that there could be a sustained and satisfactory identification of Europeans with the overseas territory itself, as in *The Adulterous Woman*. In *The Renegade* a missionary is captured by an outcast southern Algerian tribe, has his tongue torn out (an eerie parallel with Paul Bowles's story *A Distant Episode*), and becomes a super-zealous partisan of the tribe, joining in an ambush of French forces. This is as if to say that going native can only be the result of mutilation, which in turn produces a diseased, ultimately unacceptable loss of identity.

### The Gathering Crisis

A matter of months separates this late (1957) book of stories (the individual publication of each of the stories is interlaced with the appearance of *The Fall* in 1956) from the contents of the later pieces in Camus's *Chroniques algériennes* published in 1958. Although some passages in *Exile* are a throwback to the earlier lyricism and controlled nostalgia of *Noctes*, one of Camus's few atmospheric works on life in Algeria, the stories are filled with anxiety about the gathering crisis. Here we should bear in mind—and I shall have more to say about this other history a little later—that the Algerian Revolution was officially announced and launched on 1 November 1954; the Sétif massacres had occurred in May 1945, and the years before that (when Camus was working on *L'Étranger*) were filled with events fuelled by Algerian nationalism in its long and bloody resistance to French colonization. Behind that was the invasion and incorporation of Algeria by France, which began in 1830 and was definitively resumed and consummated a decade later. So even though, according to all his biographers, Camus grew up in Algeria as a *French* youth, he was always surrounded by the signs of Franco-Algerian struggle most of which he seemed either to have evaded entirely or, in his last years, openly translated into the language, imagery and geographical apprehension

of a singular French will contesting Algeria against its native Muslim inhabitants.

That these things are yet to be noted even by appreciatively severe critics of Camus like Conor Cruise O'Brien is therefore unsurprising, since to take account of them one would not only have to situate Camus in all (as opposed to a part of) his actual history but one would also have to rely on his true French antecedents, as well as the work of post-independence Algerian novelists, historians, sociologists, political scientists. For there remains today a readily decipherable (and stubbornly persisting) Eurocentric tradition of interpretatively blocking off what Camus blocked off about Algeria all of his life, and what both he and his fictional characters blocked off in the narratives. When in the last years of his life Camus publicly and even vehemently opposed the nationalist demands put forward for Algerian independence he did so in the same way he had represented Algeria from the beginning of his artistic career, although now his words (in *Algérie* 1958<sup>9</sup> written, I gather, during the Battle of Algiers) resonate depressingly with the accents of official Anglo-French Suez rhetoric. His comments about 'Colonel Nasser', Arab and Muslim imperialism and the like are therefore familiar to us, but the one uncompromisingly severe political statement about Algeria he makes in the text suddenly appears as an unadorned political summary of his image of Algeria for which all his previous writing prepares us:

En ce qui concerne l'Algérie, l'indépendance nationale est une formule purement passionnelle. Il n'y a jamais eu encore de nation algérienne. Les Juifs, les Turcs, les Grecs, les Italiens, les Berbères, auraient autant de droit à réclamer la direction de cette nation virtuelle. Actuellement, les Arabes ne forment pas à eux seuls toute l'Algérie. L'importance et l'ancienneté du peuplement français, en particulier, suffisent à créer un problème qui ne peut se comparer à rien dans l'histoire. Les Français d'Algérie sont, eux aussi, et au sens fort du terme, des indigènes. Il faut ajouter qu'une Algérie purement arabe ne pourrait accéder à l'indépendance économique sans laquelle l'indépendance politique n'est qu'un leurre. Si insuffisant que soit l'effort français, il est d'une telle envergure qu'aucun pays, à l'heure actuelle, ne consentirait à le prendre en charge.<sup>9</sup>

This helps us to see clearly what Meursault, Janine, Rieux and Tarrou enact, especially at those privileged moments when Camus represents a native bond between French *colons* and the physical geography of Algeria. Despite the fact of an overwhelming Arab majority, he says that there can be no allowances made for an Algerian nation, which

---

<sup>9</sup> Camus, *Essays*, pp. 102-13. *Ed. trans.*: 'As far as Algeria is concerned, national independence is a formula driven by nothing other than passion. There has never yet been an Algerian nation. The Jews, Turks, Greeks, Italians or Berbers would be as entitled to claim the leadership of this potential nation. As things stand, the Arabs alone do not comprise the whole of Algeria. The size and length of the French settlement, in particular, are enough to create a problem that cannot be compared to anything else in history. The French of Algeria are also natives, in the strong sense of the word. Moreover, a purely Arab Algeria could not achieve that economic independence without which political independence is nothing but an illusion. However inadequate the French effort has been, it is of such proportions that no other country would today agree to take over the responsibility.'

has never existed. Even if the presence of Berbers, Turks, Italians and Jews in Algeria is neither equivalent nor reducible to all the other non-Arab presences there, Camus's point holds because 'l'effort français', to say nothing of 'l'ancienneté du peuplement français', outranks everything else about the place. The irony is that wherever in his novels or descriptive pieces Camus tells a story, the French presence is either rendered (the way Janine is) standing outside narrative as an essence subject neither to time nor to interpretation, or it is presented as the only history worthy of being narrated *as history*. Hence the blankness and absence of background in the Arab killed by Meursault; hence also the sense of devastation in Oran that is implicitly meant to depend not mainly on Arab deaths (which, demographically speaking, are the ones that really matter) but on French consciousness.

It would be accurate to say therefore that Camus's narratives lay absolutely severe and ontologically prior claims to Algeria's geography. For anyone who has even a cursory acquaintance with the extended French colonial venture there that ended in 1962, these claims have much the same preposterously anomalous quality as the declaration in March 1938 by French Minister Chautemps that Arabic was 'a foreign language' so far as Algeria was concerned. Such claims are not Camus's alone, although he gave them a semi-transparent currency and helped to ensure that they have resonated up to the present. Camus inherits and uncritically accepts them as conventions shaped in the long tradition of colonial writing on Algeria, all of it forgotten today, or unacknowledged genealogically by readers and critics of Camus, most of whom find it easier to interpret his work as limited existentially to 'the human condition'.

### The Terrain of Domination

Just because only one side of a contest appears relevant, or because the full dynamic of colonial implantation and native resistance seems embarrassingly to detract from the humanism of a major European text, this is no reason to go along with the prevalent interpretative current. I would go so far as saying that *because* Camus's most famous fiction incorporates, intransigently recapitulates and in many ways depends on a massive French discourse on Algeria, his work is *more* and not less interesting. For Camus's clean style, the anguished moral dilemmas he lays bare, the harrowing personal fates of characters like Meursault and Rieux that he treats with such fineness and regulated irony—all these draw on and, when they are read unflinchingly against the background of French domination of Algeria, in fact revive that history with circumspect precision and a remarkable lack of remorse or compassion.

Once again the interrelationship between geography and the political contest pitting French colonialism against Algerian natives has to be reanimated exactly where, in the novels, Camus covers it with a superstructure celebrated by Sartre as providing 'a climate of the absurd'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literary Essays*, p. 32.

Both *L'Etranger* and *The Plague* are about the death of Arabs, deaths that highlight and silently inform what difficulties of conscience and reflection the French characters go through. Moreover the structure of civil society vividly presented by Camus—the municipality, the legal apparatus, hospitals, restaurants, clubs, French and Spanish entertainments, schools—is entirely French, although it too in the main administers the non-French resident population as well. So what the novels and short stories narrate is the result of a victory won over a pacified and, from the time of the initial conquest in 1830, a vastly reduced Muslim population whose rights over the land, Algeria's geography, have been severely curtailed. Thus in confirming and consolidating French priority, Camus neither disputes nor in the slightest way dissents from the campaign over sovereignty waged by French colonialism against Algerian Muslims for over a hundred years.

At the centre of the contest stands the military struggle, whose first great protagonists are Marshall Theodore Bugeaud and the Emir Abdel Kader, the one a ferocious martinet whose thoroughgoing patriarchal severity toward the Algerian natives begins in 1836 as an effort at discipline and ends a decade or so later with a policy of genocide and massive territorial expropriation, the other a Sufi mystic and relentless guerrilla fighter, endlessly regrouping, reforming, rededicating his troops against a far stronger and more modern invading enemy. To read the documents of the time, whether found in a collection of Bugeaud's letters, proclamations and dispatches compiled and published at about the same time as *L'Etranger*, or in a recent edition of Abdel Kader's Sufi poetry edited and translated into French by Michel Chodkiewicz,<sup>11</sup> or in a remarkable portrait of the psychology of the conquest reconstructed from French diaries and letters of the 1830's and 1840's by Mostafa Lacheraf, senior member of the FLN, and post-independence professor at the University of Algiers,<sup>12</sup> is to perceive the dynamic of what makes Camus's diminishment of the Arab presence inevitable.

The core of French military policy as articulated by Bugeaud and his officers was the *razzia*, or punitive raid on Algerian villages, their homes, harvests, women and children. 'The Arabs,' said Bugeaud, 'must be prevented from sowing, from harvesting, and from pasturing their flocks.'<sup>13</sup> In his study, Lacheraf gives a sampling of the poetic exhilaration recorded time after time by French officers, their sense that here at last was an opportunity for *guerre à outrance* beyond all morality or need. General Changarnier, for instance, describes the pleasant distraction vouchsafed his troops in raiding peaceful villages; this type of activity is taught by the scriptures, he says, in which Joshua and other great leaders can be seen conducting 'quite appalling *razzias*'. Ruin, total destruction, uncompromising brutality are condoned not only because legitimized by God but because, in words echoed and re-echoed

<sup>11</sup> Emir Abdel Kader, *Œuvres spirituelles*, Paris 1982.

<sup>12</sup> Mostafa Lacheraf, *L'Algérie: nation et société*, Paris 1965.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Abdullah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib: An Interpretive Essay*, Princeton 1977, p. 301.

from Bugeaud to Salan, 'the Arabs only understand brute force.'<sup>14</sup>

Lacheraf comments on the French military effort in the first couple of decades that it went well beyond its object—the suppression of Algerian resistance—and attained the absolute status of an ideal.<sup>15</sup> Its other side, as expressed with tireless zeal by Bugeaud himself, was the colonization of the country. The exasperation that seems ubiquitous in his letters toward the end of his stay in Algeria derived from the way in which European civilian emigrants were simply using up the resources of Algeria without restraint or reason; leave colonization to the military, he said, but to no avail.<sup>16</sup> Indeed one of the quiet themes running through French fiction, from Balzac to Psicharri and Loti, is the abuse of Algeria and the scandals deriving from shady financial schemes operated by unscrupulous individuals for whom the openness of the place permitted nearly every conceivable thing to be done if profit could be promised or expected. There are unforgettable portraits of this state of affairs in Daudet's *Tartarin de Tarascon* and Maupassant's *Bel Ami*.<sup>17</sup>

### Destruction and Reconstitution

But the crucial matter is how the destruction wrought upon Algeria by the French was systematic on the one hand, and constitutive of a new French polity on the other. About this no contemporary witness between 1840 and 1870 was in any doubt. Some, like de Tocqueville whose criticisms of American policy towards Blacks and native Indians were very stern, saw the advance of European civilization as necessitating the greatest cruelties against the Muslim *indigènes*: therefore in his view total conquest became equivalent to French greatness. He considered Islam to be synonymous with 'polygamy, the isolation of women, the absence of all political life, a tyrannical and omnipresent government which forces men to conceal themselves and to seek all their satisfactions in family life.'<sup>18</sup> And because the natives were, in his view, nomadic, he believed 'that all means of desolating these tribes ought to be used. I make an exception only in case of what is interdicted by international law and that of humanity.' But, as Melvin Richter comments, Tocqueville said nothing 'in 1846 when it was revealed that hundreds of Arabs had been smoked to death in the course of the *razzias* he had approved for their humane quality.'<sup>19</sup> 'Unfortunate necessities', Tocqueville thought, but nowhere

---

<sup>14</sup> Lacheraf, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Bugeaud, *Par l'Épée et par la charrie*, Paris 1948. Bugeaud's later career was equally distinguished: he commanded the troops who fired on the insurgent crowds on 23 February 1848, and was repaid by Flaubert in *L'Education sentimentale* who had the unpopular marshal's portrait pierced in the stomach during the storming of the Palais Royal on 24 February 1848.

<sup>17</sup> See Martine Astier Louffi, *Littérature et colonialisme. L'Expansion coloniale vue dans la littérature romanesque française 1871-1914*, Paris 1971.

<sup>18</sup> Melvin Richter, 'Tocqueville on Algeria', *Review of Politics* 25, 1963, p. 377.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 380. For a fuller and more recent account of this material, see Marwan R. Buheiry, *The Formation and Perception of the Modern Arab World*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad, Princeton 1989, especially Part I, 'European Perceptions of the Orient', which has four essays on 19th-century France and Algeria, one of which is on Tocqueville and Islam.

near as important as the 'good government' owed the 'half-civilized' Muslims by French government.

To today's leading North African historian, Abdullah Laroui, French colonial policy intended nothing less than to destroy the Algerian state. Clearly Camus's declaration that an Algerian nation never existed took the ravages of French policy as having wiped the slate clean. Nevertheless, as I have been saying, post-colonial events impose upon us both a longer narrative and a more inclusive and demystifying interpretation. Laroui says: 'The history of Algeria from 1830 to 1870 is made up of pretences: the colons who allegedly wished to transform the Algerians into men like themselves, when in reality their only desire was to transform the soil of Algeria into French soil; the military, who supposedly respected the local traditions and way of life, whereas in reality their only interest was to govern with the least possible effort; the claim of Napoleon III that he was building an Arab kingdom, whereas his central ideas were the "Americanization" of the French economy and the French colonization of Algeria.'<sup>20</sup>

When he arrives in Algeria in 1872 Daudet's Tartarin sees few traces of what he calls 'the Orient', which had been promised him, and finds himself instead in what is an overseas copy of his native Tarrascon. For writers like Segalen and Gide, Algeria is the exotic locale in which their own spiritual problems—like Janine's in *The Adulterous Woman*—can be addressed and therapeutically treated. Scant attention is paid to the natives whose purpose is quite routinely to provide transient thrills or opportunities, as in the case not only of Michel in *The Immoralist* but also of Malraux's protagonist Perken in the Cambodian setting of *The Royal Way*, for exercises of will. Differences in French representations of Algeria, whether they are the crude harem postcards studied so memorably by Malek Alloula,<sup>21</sup> or the sophisticated anthropological constructions unearthed by Fanny Colonna and Claude Brahimi,<sup>22</sup> or the impressive narrative structures for which Camus's works furnish so important an example, can all be traced back to the geographical *morce-main* of French colonial practice.

How deeply felt, how consistently replenished, how completely incorporated and institutionalized an enterprise in French discourse we can further discover in early 20th-century works of geographical and colonial thought. Albert Sarraut's *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* states no less a goal for colonialism than the biological unity of mankind, '*la solidarité humaine*'. Those races who are incapable of utilizing their resources (e.g. natives in the French overseas territories) are to be cultivated, helped, brought back to the human family; 'here, for the colonizer, is the formal counterpart of the act of possession; it removes from the act its character of plunder and makes it a creation of human law.'<sup>23</sup> In his classic work on colonial policy and land

---

<sup>20</sup> Laroui, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

<sup>21</sup> Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, Minneapolis 1986.

<sup>22</sup> Fanny Colonna and Claude Haim Brahimi, 'Du bon usage de la science coloniale', in *Le mal du soir*, Paris 1976.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales*, Paris 1931, p. 113.

distribution, Georges Hardy ventures that the assimilation of colonies to France 'caused inspiration to burst forth and not only led to the appearance of numerous colonial novels but also opened minds to the diversity of moral and mental forms, encouraging writers to adopt new modes of psychological exploration.'<sup>24</sup> Hardy's book was published in 1937; Rector of the Academy of Algiers, he was also honorary director of the Ecole Coloniale and, in the uncannily declarative phrases of his description, an immediate forerunner of Camus.

### A Metropolitan Transfiguration

Interpreted as an integral element in this background, Camus's novels and stories very precisely inflect a distilled version of the by now mostly invisible traditions, idioms, discursive strategies of Algeria's appropriation by France. He gives to what in effect is a massive 'structure of feeling' its most exquisite articulation, its final evolution. But for this structure to be discernible Camus's works must be considered as forming a metropolitan transfiguration of the colonial dilemma: they represent the colon writing for a French audience, yet the colon's personal history is tied irrevocably to this southern department of France, Algeria; a history taking place anywhere else but in Algeria is unintelligible. Yet the ceremonies of bonding with the territory that are enacted by Meursault in Algiers, or Tarrou and Rieux enfolded within the walls of Oran, Janine during a Saharan vigil, ironically stimulate queries in the reader about the need for such affirmations. When the violence of the French past is thus inadvertently recalled, these ceremonies assume the role of a foreshortened, highly compressed commemoration of survival, that of a community with nowhere to go at that moment.

Meursault's predicament is more radical than any of the others. For even if the falsely constituted law court (which, as Conor Cruise O'Brien rightly says, was a most unlikely place for a Frenchman to be tried after killing a poor Arab) is assumed to have a continuing existence, Meursault himself understands the utterly prescribed finality at which he has arrived despite the ritual of justice he has endured. At last he can experience relief and defiance together: 'J'avais eu raison, j'avais encore raison, j'avais toujours raison. J'avais vécu de telle façon et j'aurais pu vivre de telle autre. J'avais fait ceci et je n'avais pas fait cela. Je n'avais pas fait cette autre. Et après? C'était comme si j'avais attendu pendant tout le temps cette minute et cette petite aube où je serais justifié.'<sup>25</sup>

There are no choices left here, no alternatives, no humane substitutes. The *colon* embodies both the contribution of his community's real human effort and the obstacle of refusing to give up a political system

<sup>24</sup> Georges Hardy, *La Politique coloniale et le partage de la terre aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris 1937, p. 441

<sup>25</sup> Camus, *Témoins, Récits, Nouveaux*, Paris 1962, p. 1210. *Ed. trans.* 'I had been right, I was again right, I was still right. I had lived like this and could have lived like that. I had done this and had not done that. I had not done that other thing. And so? It was as if I had all along been waiting for this moment and this daybreak when I would be vindicated.'



constructed out of the many systematic injustices perpetrated on a native population. But the deeply conflicted strength of Meursault's suicidal self-acknowledgement could only have emerged out of *that* specific history and in *that* specific community. At the end, however, he not only accepts what he is but he understands why his mother, confined to an old persons' home, has decided to remarry: 'elle avait joué à recommencer . . . Si près de la mort, maman devait s'y sentir libre et prête à tout revivre.'<sup>26</sup> We have done what we have done here, and so let us do it again. A tragically unsentimental obduracy turns itself into a symbol of an unflinching human capacity for renewed generation and re-generation. And this of course is the way Camus's readers have taken *L'Étranger*, imputing to it the universality of a liberated existential humanity facing cosmic indifference and human cruelty with impudent stoicism.

To re-situate *L'Étranger* in the actual geographical nexus from which its brief narrative trajectory emerges is to interpret it as a heightened form of historical experience. Like Orwell's work and status as 'Orwell' in England, Camus's plain style and unadorned reporting of social situations conceal the rivetingly complex contradictions out of which they are fashioned, contradictions unresolvable by his feelings of loyalty to French Algeria delivered as a parable of the human condition. This is what his social and literary reputation still depends on. Yet because there was always the more difficult and challenging alternative of first judging then refusing the mixture of territorial seizure and political sovereignty that blocked a compassionate, shared understanding of Algerian nationalism, Camus's limitations seem unacceptably paralysing. Counterpoised with the decolonizing literature of the time, both French and Arab—Tillion, Kateb Yacine, Fanon, Genet for instance—Camus's narratives assume a vital, albeit negative role. In them the tragic human seriousness of the colonial effort achieves its last great clarification before ruin overtakes it, with a waste and sadness we have still not completely understood or recovered from.

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1211. 'She had played at starting again . . . So close to death, mother had to feel free and ready to live everything again.'

# CRITICAL BOOKS...

## PEASANT-CITIZEN AND SLAVE The Foundations of Athenian Democracy

Ellen Meiksins Wood

'...learned, elegantly argued and, I think, important...Ellen Wood is inviting us, indeed I would say obliging us, to reconsider our picture of Athens.'

*The Independent*

£9.95/US\$17.95 paper 0 86091 911 0

## PRISONERS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class

Mike Davis

'...one of the most uncompromising books about american political economy ever written...brilliant, provocative and exhaustively researched.'

*Voice Literary Supplement*

£10.95/US\$15.95 paper 0 86091 840 8

## LOGICS OF DISINTEGRATION Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory

Peter Dews

'A major and brilliant work...which represents a watershed in the fraught ambiguous relations between traditional Marxism and its Postmodern critics.'

*Terry Eagleton, New Statesman*

£10.95/US\$15.95 paper 0 86091 813 0

£32.95/US\$50.00 hardback 0 86091 106 6

## DISCOURSES OF EXTREMITY Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances

Norman Geras

A powerful critique, both of theoretical deficiencies within socialism and the discourse-based perspective of so-called 'post-Marxism'.

£8.95/US\$19.95 paper 0 86091 980 3

£24.95/US\$45.00 hardback 0 86091 286 3

## THE OVERTHROW OF COLONIAL SLAVERY

Robin Blackburn

'...opens new vistas with the necessary foundations of historical range and precision.'

*C.L.R. James*

£12.95/US\$19.95 paper 0 86091 901 3

£29.95/US\$49.50 hardback 0 86091 188 3

## THE FATE OF THE FOREST Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon

Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn

'...discriminating and constructive...a must for readers who feel a responsibility to urge practical courses of action upon their elected politicians.'

*Sunday Times*

£18.95/US\$24.95 hardback 0 86091 281 2



VERSO

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR.

USA: 29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001-2291.

# ...FOR CRITICAL READERS.

## CLASSES

Eric Olin Wright

'...almost certain to be the most important book on social classes this decade...a major breakthrough in the conceptualization of class relations.'

*American Journal of Sociology*

£11.95/US\$18.95 paper 0 86091 812 2

## SOCIAL THEORY AND THE CRISIS OF MARXISM

Joseph McCartney

A radical and meticulous argument for traditional Marxism as an intellectual force in the contemporary world

£9.95/US\$17.95 paper 0 86091 948 X  
£29.95/US\$50.00 hardback 0 86091 231 0

## ANTICHRIST IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Christopher Hill

'Here is good vintage Hill, daring to take seriously eccentric-sounding subjects, and never making the mistake of underestimating the genuine religious basis of dissent.'

Bernard Crick, *New Statesman*

£9.95/US\$15.95 paper 0 86091 997 8

## ECHOES OF THE MARSEILLAISE

### Two Centuries Look Back on the French Revolution

Eric Hobsbawm

A stimulating mixture of historiography and political economy which, in dealing with the ways subsequent centuries have interpreted the French Revolution, provides a much-needed epilogue of clarity and reason to a muddled bicentenary.

£8.95 paper 0 86091 937 4  
£24.95 hardback 0 86091 282 5

## LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Norberto Bobbio

This essay, by one of Italy's most distinguished political philosophers, offers a lucid and succinct discussion of the relationship between liberalism and democracy, from its theoretical origins to its current tensions.

£8.95/US\$14.95 paper 0 86091 985 4  
£26.95/US\$45.00 hardback 0 86091 26 8

## THE DIALECTIC OF CHANGE

Boris Kagarlitsky

'extremely competent and often brilliant analysis of the natural causes of the failures of the stalinist (and partly leninist) model of Soviet-style bureaucratic socialism.'

Zhores Medvedev

£10.95/US\$18.95 paper 0 86091 973 0  
£32.95/US\$50.00 hardback 0 86091 258 2



VERSO

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HL  
USA: 29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001-2291.

# POLITY PRESS

## **The Consequences of Modernity**

**ANTHONY GIDDENS**

In this major theoretical statement, Giddens offers a new and provocative interpretation of the institutional transformations associated with modernity. This book builds upon the author's previous theoretical writings and will be of fundamental interest to anyone concerned with Giddens' overall project.

(May), 186 pages, Hardback £19.95 (0 7456 0783 4)

## **Fire in the Rain**

**The Democratic Consequences of Chernobyl**

**PETER GOULD**

Fire in the Rain tells the story of the Chernobyl disaster and of the trail of political reactions, from misinformation to secrecy, that followed the radioactive fallout around Europe. The result is compelling and disconcerting, a unique record of how those in power reacted to the world's worst ecological disaster.

(April), 192 pages, Hardback £25.00 (0 7456 0787 X) Paperback £6.95 (0 7456 0788 8)

## **Human Rights in a Changing World**

**ANTONIO CASSESE**

Written in a clear, lively and engaging way, this book examines the nature and role of human rights in the context of international relations in the modern world. Cassese provides a global view of the field of human rights today, develops a general analysis for human rights, and formulates an agenda for action.

(July), 220 pages, Hardback £19.50 (0 7456 0723 3)

## **E.P. Thompson**

**Critical Perspectives**

*Edited by HARVEY J. KAYE and KEITH MCCLELLAND*

Written from a critical but sympathetic standpoint this is the first work to assess the impact of E.P. Thompson's work as historian, socialist and peace activist, and it makes a substantial contribution to the scholarly and practical appraisal of Thompson's ideas as a whole.

(May) 300 pages, Hardback £35.00 (0 7456 0160 X) Paperback £9.95 (0 7456 0238 X)

## **Gender and Knowledge**

**Elements of a Post-Modern Feminism**

**SUSAN HEKMAN**

By bringing together and systematically analysing the relations between post-modernism and feminism Hekman is able to make a major intervention into current debates in social theory and philosophy, thus contributing to the development of a more sophisticated approach to feminist issues than those now current.

(June), 250 pages, Hardback £29.50 (0 7456 0633 9)

## ‘Cambodia Will Never Disappear’

In addition to pride in a unique greatness, most expressions of nationalism contain a fear of extinction. The idea that the national essence might be lost or the national culture swamped is a common one, whether this is perceived as a danger posed by the threat of conquest, racial penetration, the influence of foreign ideas or behaviour, or the economic erosion of independence. Although this notion—that the very identity of the nation itself is under threat—is widespread, it is usually confined to the rallying cries of extremist sentiment. But in the case of Cambodia it is central. There can be few countries where the theme has been accorded such weight both by its inhabitants and by foreigners. In numerable reports it is accepted that Cambodia could soon disappear; that in one way or another it will fail to survive. This long pre-dated Pol Pot. ‘Shrinking Cambodia’ is the first heading of a 1960s essay, the present continuous suggesting that by the time the reader has got to the end of the text, another square centimetre might have gone.<sup>1</sup> One of the best early accounts of Cambodia’s independence movement asserts that

only its 'neutralization', surely a vague concept, will ensure the country's 'survival as a nation'.<sup>2</sup> The suggestion is extreme—Cambodia's very existence is at stake—yet it is noted as if it were a matter of fact, despite all the evidence that nations are remarkably durable.

Many essays and articles have repeated the trope. They were not the expression of far-sighted judgements that foresaw the war which would scourge Cambodia from 1970–75, the horrors of Pol Pot, the Vietnamese invasion of 1979 and the subsequent famine and blockade. Rather such accounts reproduced the key myth of the country's nationalist ideology, that Cambodia is on the brink of extinction. Hysterical, paranoid even, like all successful ideologies it contains more than a single grain of truth. But this served to make the 'falsehood' all the more effective. The myth contributed directly to Khmer Rouge fanaticism. It helped to create a variant of the catastrophe it prophesied.

It did so in particular through the cult of Angkor. This allowed the French to give Cambodian nationalism an ideological form which in fact oppressed the people it claimed to represent. It was a 'colonial nationalism' that anchored modern Cambodia in a false beginning, extolling its magnificence to humiliate all the more the present incumbents of the territory.

When Pol Pot captured Phnom Penh in 1975, its inhabitants, like those of other towns, were driven into the countryside and termed 'new people'. They were obliged to undertake forced labour and to create a vast chequer-board of fields, to be irrigated by geometric canals. Many of the survivors have told of the futility of their labour, as the supposed irrigation was often useless. But the mobilization was more than just a mechanism for the imposition of control over a hostile population. It was also a bid for a 'great leap forward' that would make Pol Pot's 'Kampuchea' a self-sufficient, independent, even rice-exporting nation<sup>3</sup>—an effort justified by the belief that in early medieval Angkor massive water-works made possible multiple, season-defying harvests. This notion was propagated by French archaeology. The careful calculations of a Dutchman found it to be as misconceived as the Khmer Rouge canals. The very attempt to throw off 'dependency' proved to be in thrall to a foreign ideal. Today, as the accessories of Chinese and American 'realpolitik', Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge reproduce yet another dependency as they battle for Cambodia's 'independence'.

As I finalize this article, the Khmer Rouge, armed and fed through the auspices of Peking, Washington, Bangkok and the UN, seek to

---

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Gordon, *The Dimensions of Conflict in Southeast Asia*, New Jersey 1966, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> V.M. Reddi, *A History of the Cambodian Independence Movement*, Tirupati 1970, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 'Kampuchea' is a Pol-Potism not a change of name. It is as if a regime in Madrid insisted that Anglo-Saxons call its country *Espafia*. The 'nationalist' spelling should never have been accepted (see my 'Cambodian Possibilities', *International Journal of Politics*, Fall 1986, p. 88), and it is poetic justice that all the libraries, newspapers and surveys who did so must now switch back to 'Cambodia', at the request of the Hun Sen government.

capture the temples of Angkor. Here, they believe, they can set up their own capital, with the bas-reliefs to shield them from bombardment. Now that their primary patron, Deng Xiaoping, has unveiled his colours in Tiananmen Square as well as Southeast Asia, a diplomatic truce might frustrate them. Yet few things would be more fitting than for the Khmer Rouge to meet their nemesis in a last stand at Angkor Wat.

### The Angkor Empire

Angkor was an inland empire on the northern banks of the Tonle Sap, or 'Great Lake'. From the ninth century its influence dominated mainland Southeast Asia. Around Angkor, in what is now the province of Siem Reap, a relatively sophisticated hydraulic system helped to sustain its influence from what is now the Thai-Burma border area, across the Menam valley, and down the length of the Mekong to its delta. The centralized, Hindu empire reached its apogee, perhaps, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but even at the end of the thirteenth century, in 1294, the Chinese Chou Ta-Kouan, could visit and stay in what he saw as the wealthiest state to China's south. By then, Buddhism had become the major religion, and the building of temple-mountains had ceased. But Chou Ta-Kouan in a clipped account has left a vivid picture of the wealth and life of Angkor.

All that remains of this considerable, medieval polity are the traces of its waterworks and vast, sometimes splendid monuments. Their true greatness is found in neither the size nor the number of the constructions, but in the wealth, quality and range of bas-reliefs and statues. The carvings of Angkor undoubtedly rank amongst the greatest of artistic achievements. The largest number to have survived come from an intense period of building from 113, the beginning of the reign of Suryavarnam II (who ordered the construction of the temple of Angkor Wat) to 1219, the end of the reign of Jayavarnam VII, who had built the walled citadel of Angkor Thom. At the centre of Angkor Thom is an amazing cluster of towers constituting the Bayon: a stone-mountain from every pillar of which Jayavarnam's own face, impassive and all-seeing, doubles Janus as it looks out in all four directions at once.

These achievements may have been over-praised. Angkor Wat has been described as 'the largest religious edifice built by man'.<sup>4</sup> But to measure its greatness by the fact that it is nearly a mile square is to deny it a proper admiration through hyperbole. Thus the Church of Saint Sophia, to take only one example, was for nearly a millennium the largest domed space in the world until St Peter's was constructed. Saint Sophia still stands in Istanbul. It was built 600 years before Angkor Wat, while Khmer architects never managed to discover the principles of the arch. This does not diminish the vitality and expertise of the bas-reliefs, with their tremendous expressive range. On the contrary, it is to give Angkor its rank as a major civilization

---

<sup>4</sup> D.J.M. Tate, *The Making of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 1, Kuala Lumpur 1971, p. 469.

comparable to others whose despotisms have also left us relics of immense scale, skill and beauty.<sup>5</sup>

The reasons for the decline of Angkor remain disputed. In 1431 it was overrun by Thai armies. The Khmer shifted their capital southwards. They counter-attacked the Thais, and in the 1570s there was a Khmer attempt to restore Angkor. Spaniards visited it then and reported its magnificence. In 1594, however, the Khmer capital at Lovek was sacked by the Thais, and its archives were apparently destroyed entirely. Henceforth a Khmer polity tottered on, under Thai suzerainty and—for the first time—Vietnamese pressure as well. It has been suggested that the inhabitants originally fled Angkor because its building programme was too heavy to bear (yet it survived in splendour for a century after the building stopped). It has been proposed that military defeat was a prime cause of its decline, yet this does not answer why it should have become so weakened as to be defeated. It has been speculated that the silting up of the hydraulic system, the destruction of canals by war, and the exhaustion of the soils through centuries of use, undermined Angkor's economic foundations.

In a recent, tentative suggestion, Michael Vickery says, 'I would speak not of the "fall of Angkor", but rather of a gradual shift of power from Angkor to two centres, Ayutthaya (the then Thai capital) and Phnom-Penh-Lovek, both on lower rivers with good sea access.'<sup>6</sup> He suggests that the rise of direct Chinese trade was one of the causes drawing away vitality from Angkor's inland 'agricultural despotism', yet he insists that something must have happened inside Angkor as well. He does not say what. The argument is unresolved. Part of its significance, however, is itself historical. A fascination with the decline of Oriental civilizations was a standard refrain in nineteenth-century colonial perspectives of the East; *they* have failed. The European concern was undoubtedly self-serving, whatever the truth historically. An equally significant question might have been: why did Angkor last so long? Inauspiciously sited, it was nonetheless a tropical imperium of 500 years' duration. Yet that historical achievement did not impress itself upon nineteenth-century Europe so much as the reasons for Angkor's decline and fall.

### After the Fall

For the modern history of the Khmer, the descendants of the stone-mountain builders and carvers, three aspects of the demise of Angkor are important. Two are literary, the other demographic. No account survives of Angkor's own 'world-view', apart from the minimal record of stone inscriptions. Its palm-leaf literature has disintegrated or has been destroyed. We can gaze upon its lively and intimate carvings,

---

<sup>5</sup> A comparative survey of all the great non-Western monuments, from the Egyptian and Mayan pyramids to Pagan and Borobudur, would help to situate Angkor, especially if it also compared the symbolism and meaning projected onto them by the West.

<sup>6</sup> From his PhD Thesis, *Cambodia after Angkor, the Chronological Evidence for the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, Vol. 1, Yale 1977, pp. 510–11.



we can learn the names of its kings, we can read the, possibly abbreviated, account of Chou Ta-Kouan. That is, we can observe Angkor quite closely *as outsiders*, but not through the eyes of those who ruled and wrote in Angkor itself. Folk tales remain, which are open to interpretation, but the social, political and moral traditions of Angkor are largely lost, in a way that Rome's or early Islam's (Angkor's contemporary) have not been. This applied not only to foreigners but also to the Khmer themselves. Hence the loss of Angkor's own literature has left the contemporary, educated Khmer vulnerable to the scrutiny of Western scholars, should he link his historic identity to that of the temples.

A second associated silence is that there is no reliable account of immediate post-Angkorean history, most of whose traces were probably destroyed at Lovek. There are only some Cambodian chronicles, and the earliest extant versions date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They purport to annotate the continuous succession of Khmer kings. In a careful analysis, Michael Vickery has demonstrated that the chroniclers fulfilled their task of recording an unbroken lineage by borrowing from the Thai chronicles for the period between 1450 and 1600. For a century and a half, then, the only continuous Khmer record was 'composed artificially'.<sup>7</sup> The history of five generations of Khmer rule after 1450 seems virtually lost. It is hard to imagine a more complete destruction.

Third, the lands around Angkor were for the most part abandoned, and allowed to return to the wild, as the population shifted southeast of the lake. Angkor Wat remained an important religious centre, but Angkor retained no economic attractions after the end of the sixteenth century. For that reason, Western traders ceased to visit. When Britain and France took over from Spain and Portugal as the major imperialist powers, they had no reason to pick up the Iberians' knowledge of Angkor. China and India were the prize, while the Khmer dominion itself was reduced to poverty. Angkor became something that was unknown *to the West*. As a result, the French were able to convince themselves that they 'discovered' Angkor in the mid-nineteenth century, little more than a century ago. The moment was of the utmost importance in the formation of modern Cambodian nationalism. There were no internal records of Angkor's own, to counterpose to foreign views. There was no credible account of what happened to the Khmer after they withdrew from Angkor, or why they did so. The monuments themselves were surrounded by jungle; unlike the pyramids they were remote from Western eyes. Together this meant that the French could incorporate Angkor into their own perspectives, and then project this back onto the Cambodians themselves.

The French were able to appropriate Angkor and use it to reprimand the inhabitants they conquered. 'Look how you have fallen', the Europeans said, the implication being that only the French were able to

---

<sup>7</sup> Michael Vickery, 'The Composition and Transmission of the Ayudhya and Cambodian Chronicles', in A. Reid and D. Marr, eds., *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, Singapore 1979, p. 130.

save Cambodia. The notion was rubbed in at the beginning of this century when the provinces of Siem Reap and Battambang were wrested from Siam in whose territory they were then located. The temples themselves were thereby 'saved' from Thai control and 're-incorporated' into Cambodia through the exercise of European power. The real charge, however, was pan-historic and struck at the self-identity of the contemporary Khmer. For if we think of today's Cambodia as the political descendant of Angkor, reality is already on the run. The ethnographic continuity is not in question: there is a human connection which can be traced retrospectively. But to suggest that there is a national (in the sense of a nation-state) continuity projects the Khmer as a people sliding down a millennial incline. Yesterday they were great. Today, they are small. Tomorrow, therefore, it can be presumed they will be gone. If we begin with early medieval grandeur, then in the face of most contemporary trends Cambodia will be seen as about to suffer a medieval fate.

This perspective came to be accepted, however, by most educated Cambodians: they internalized an 'impossible identity'. In seeking to escape its grip, many Khmer became even more enmeshed in colonial historicism: independence meant more than getting rid of the colonialists; Cambodia's own past 'national' greatness had to be reasserted. The sentiment can be a deep-felt passion, as anyone knows who has heard a Cambodian ask, 'How could our little country have made *that*?', that being Angkor. Of course, there is no answer—it is as if a frustrated inhabitant of Rome were to demand in the middle of a traffic jam how his city could ever have created a vast empire. Such questions elide distinct social orders. It was precisely not Cambodia which made Angkor. As a symbol flapping on a flag, Angkor has a pleasing uniqueness. But to believe in and identify with a political continuity between today's society and that imperial order, encourages ultra-nationalist folly; a violent inclination to wasteful grandeur; a sense of inexplicable loss. These are all powerful elements in the Cambodian nationalist structure of feeling. (It is not merely coincidental that they are also evocative of French nationalism.) After independence the country's political leaders were to impose the intoxication upon their compatriots, mildly with Sihanouk and then virulently with Pol Pot. The latter's own broadcasts proclaimed: 'As we look at Angkor we are struck by the fact that the whole area was crisscrossed with straight roads and canals in a magnificent system... flawlessly planned and built. Now we are again blending tradition with science.' And: 'We irrigate the fields. We prevent flooding... masters of the country, descendants of the builders of Angkor.'<sup>8</sup>

### Some Necessary Distinctions

To disentangle the threads that tied this knot, some distinctions are necessary. First, the historical experience of Angkor is lost although its physical existence always remained known. David Chandler has

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over*, New York 1986, pp. 201, 251

discerned some of the cultural traces in nineteenth-century Khmer society that bore the impress of Angkor, yet even these were largely unconscious, it seems. Before the French, Cambodians knew about Angkor as a place and felt that it had something to do with the past: but they did not have any clear idea of what Angkor had been and in no political sense did they relate it to their present. Chandler puts it as follows: 'They ignored the fact that the ruins were evidence of a *Cambodian* kingdom' (his emphasis). Even Chandler has seen the rupture as a forgetting, what he terms a 'collective amnesia'.<sup>9</sup> But it is the unstated premiss which is at fault. All national histories combine wholesale amnesia with partial recollection. None is an 'objective', impartial reading. This does not mean that such popular views of history should not be challenged. It means simply that they are not easily subject to the canons of scholarly discourse. Chandler is obliged, through the logic entailed by accepting the Angkorean myth, to state: 'During the colonial era, the French gave Cambodia back its past'. One can also argue that the colonialists gave Cambodia a French past. At any rate the 'gift' was far from being unconditional aid.<sup>10</sup>

The second distinction which needs to be made, then, is between the uncovering of *Angkor's* history, which was a major, scholarly recuperation, and the implanting of this knowledge into the brains of modern Cambodians as their historic memory, as their 'own' origins. The starting point for this process, by which the French transformed the Khmer identity, began with the alleged discovery of Angkor in 1860 by Henri Mouhot, three years before the French formally became the colonialist protector of Cambodia. It is still believed that the French 'came upon' Angkor, and then revealed its existence—a major discovery indeed. This is what one would conclude, for example, if one looked up the entry for 'Angkor' in the *Grande Larousse Encyclopédique*. As well as having an effect on Cambodian identity, such a notion simultaneously reflects the role of France: it projects the French role as one of salvation rather than conquest; it diminishes the Khmer and lauds the Europeans.

A wonderfully complacent version of the myth, composed by Malcolm MacDonald, may help us to ask what really happened in 1860. MacDonald was the British 'Commissioner General for Southeast Asia' from 1948 to 1955. His father, Ramsey MacDonald, had been the first Labour Prime Minister and had later formed a national government into which he promoted his son. Young Malcolm was blocked by Churchill from pursuing his political career and became a diplomat. MacDonald visited Cambodia a number of times and proclaimed the friendship of Sihanouk. He frequented Angkor and published a book about it. He asserts that Angkor Wat was completely lost to the jungle. Then some Buddhist priests began 'once more to mumble prayers in its cloisters'. It was no rediscovery by them, however, for 'these were just handfuls of country yokels and unworldly ascetics,

<sup>9</sup> 'The Tragedy of Cambodian History', *Pacific Affairs*, Fall 1979, pp. 411–12.

<sup>10</sup> As above, but see Chandler's *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder 1983) for a nuanced narrative that inquires precisely into the relationship between the society's post-Angkorean dark ages and the Colonial period, in a major development of his work.

ignorant of history and archaeology . . . Occasionally a rumour of the ruin's existence reached the outside world. Stories circulated . . . but most people treated them with scepticism, like legends which sometimes spread about fabulous, romantic, unreal places . . . Then, one morning in 1860, a wandering naturalist, Henri Mouhot, turned a corner along a forest path and spied ahead, looming through gaps in the green foliage, the grey towers of Angkor Wat. He halted in astonishment, scarcely able to believe his eyes.' A good story. Later, MacDonald informs his readers that the jungle was taking over the monuments and that 'Angkor would have crumbled to bits [he admits 'in one or two millennia'] if after the first seven hundred years Henri Mouhot had not appeared on the scene and cried a halt to the slaughter.'<sup>11</sup>

That an influential diplomat, with access to Cambodia's best guides, French and Khmer, including Sihanouk, could have produced such rubbish is evidence of the *received ideas* prevalent in Cambodia in the 1950s. Mouhot was not the discoverer of Angkor, nor ever thought himself to be so. Far from coming across the temples by surprise, while 'wandering' through the jungle, before he set out he wrote, 'am now about to go northward to visit the famous ruins of Angkor'.<sup>12</sup> He was *taken* there; he was then shown round them. Historically, Angkor Wat had remained a religious site and was looked after as such. From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century it had been for Buddhists 'one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Southeast Asia'.<sup>13</sup> Mouhot travelled along a roadway through the jungle; at the temple he noted that from 'constant use', carts had 'worn two deep ruts in the flag-stones', by the principal entrance. He mentions the thatched roof that 'modern worshippers' had erected in Angkor Thom. He implies that Khmer and Thai monarchs disagreed over who had the more legitimate claims to tracing their forebears to Angkor. He reports that the King of Siam, whose country then included Angkor, had ordered a local mandarin to dismantle one of the best bas-reliefs, so as to have it transported to Bangkok.<sup>14</sup> There is other proof that knowledge of Angkor was widespread. Prior to the appearance of Mouhot's account, D.O. King—after a trip to Cambodia—gave an accurate description of Angkor Wat without having actually gone to the temple himself. He refers to a solitary building in the jungle 'in too perfect order to be called a ruin, a relic of a race far ahead of the present in all arts and sciences'.<sup>15</sup> He describes the masonry and the existence of an inscription on the building definitely in Cambodian script but not comprehensible to the local population (it was in medieval Khmer). Probably, he got part of his description from Catholic missionaries, one of whom had accompanied Mouhot to Angkor in January 1860

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm MacDonald, *Angkor*, London 1958, pp. 79–9 and 116.

<sup>12</sup> *Henri Mouhot's Diary*, Kuala Lumpur 1966, p. 81. This edition was edited by Christopher Pym who added passages from Mouhot's letters, from which this quotation comes, but also greatly abbreviated the original.

<sup>13</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, current edition: a dry entry on 'Angkor' which shows that the colonial version of events is on the wane.

<sup>14</sup> Mouhot's account in *Tour du Monde*, 1863, and Pym edition, pp. 83, 98, 109.

<sup>15</sup> D.O. King, 'Travels in Siam and Cambodia', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1860, pp. 179–80.

and acted as a guide. Another such missionary, Bouillevaux, had already published a description of Angkor (in 1858) based on a visit there in 1850. Mouhot's account did not appear until 1863.

### The Influence of Mouhot

Thus, if we take the word 'discovery' to mean uncovering the existence of something no other living humans were specifically and demonstrably aware of, Angkor was not 'discovered' by Mouhot. It was already known—indeed, as Mouhot notes, it was 'famous'. Famous, that is, to people in Southeast Asia, and to a small number of European experts. To understand the impact of Mouhot's account, another explanation is needed quite distinct from the question of 'discovery', or even 'rediscovery'.

When Mouhot's travels were published the author was dead. The only aspect of MacDonald's description that is correct, is that Mouhot was a wandering naturalist (with loyal, native servants). He had stayed with some of the hill minorities in what is now the Cambodian/Vietnamese highland border. He met the King of Cambodia. He collected butterflies. He kept a notebook, in which he also inscribed careful sketches of much of what he saw: his graphic skills were to be critical in the influence of his account. The visit to Angkor was little more than a tourist stop-over in an ambitious exploration of the Mekong. He returned to Bangkok after seeing the monuments, but did not send a description back to Paris or London. Instead, he set out again on a more lengthy trip to the upper Mekong in Laos. There, at the end of October 1861, he died of fever. He was aware of the risks that he courted, and in an early entry of his diary, he contemplates: 'Whether I fall victim to some pestilence or ferocious beasts, and some kind person takes charge of these sheets . . .'<sup>16</sup> In other words, he also knew that his memorial lay in the notes and sketches of his explorations. Hence his Sino-Thai servant, Phrai, carried the precious documents hundreds of miles back to Bangkok. From there, they were forwarded to Paris. Mouhot's personal sacrifice gave an immediately greater 'value' to his observations. As with Livingstone, who died ten years later, Mouhot's death created a certain cult around his memory, and gave a morbid excitement to his account of his travels. He became a martyr to Western scientific exploration of the world.

His death had another effect too, for it meant that his diary account was not moderated retrospectively by an attempt to present it in more scientific vein. Although he was intellectually prepared to travel to a great building when he went to Angkor, he was actually astonished by what he saw, and all the reactions of European culture at the time spilled forth with the impact of the unexpected. 'At first view, one is filled with profound admiration,' he wrote, 'and cannot but ask what has become of this powerful race, so civilized, so enlightened, the authors of these gigantic works? One of these temples—a rival to that of Solomon, and erected by some Michelangelo—might take an honourable place beside our most beautiful buildings. It is grander

---

<sup>16</sup> Pym edition, p. 74.

than anything left us by Greece and Rome, and presents a sad contrast to the state of barbarism into which the nation is now plunged.<sup>17</sup> 'Race' and 'nation', then and now: precisely the passage which had the greatest impact upon European readers, and which, for the first time in the modern West, gave full register to the splendours of Angkor, originated the agonizing problem of contemporary Khmer identity.

The impact was all the greater because of the way it was published. In 1860, as Mouhot was on his way to Angkor, the first issue of *Tour du Monde* appeared in Paris. It was a large-format weekly magazine dedicated to presenting the accounts of voyages and travels in faraway places. Polar expeditions, the habits of North African and Balkan natives, the factories of Wales, life in California—there were unending exotica to report upon. *Tour du Monde* would carry the accounts of major expeditions in serial form—Mouhot's when it came out ran over fourteen weeks. Each issue would include plenty of line drawings and engravings; the latest technology of illustrated printing was used to the full. (It was a precursor of *The National Geographic*.) Mouhot's sketches were transformed by the magazine's artists into plate after plate of engravings. The transformation was well executed, the *Tour du Monde* picture of the entrance to Angkor Wat is instantly recognizable. The impressive temple, which had never even been heard of by most readers, was suddenly there before their eyes, accompanied by Mouhot's own astonishment. It was followed by his careful, artistic annotation of bas-reliefs and other aspects of the temple complex. The drama of what he had thus uncovered was heightened even more by the last entry in his notebook, written in trembling hand, with an eye to his public and in the face of death: 'Have pity on me, oh my God...'. *Tour du Monde* appealed to its readers to subscribe to a fund, so as to honour France's colonial pioneer with a suitable tomb. Perhaps others did not forget that he wrote at one point, 'I wish her (France) to possess this land (Cambodia)'.<sup>18</sup>

### An Instant Public

The sensation was neatly executed. Mouhot's account appeared in Italian, German and English—a fine, two-volume edition was published in London, with all the graphics, within a year. The only minor embarrassment had been Bouillevaux's objection that he had already published an account of Angkor. An argument thus developed as to who was the real, or first, 'discoverer' of Angkor Wat; the debate merely reinforced the notion that it had indeed just been discovered. Poor Bouillevaux was crushed despite his evident, scientific 'priority'. Mouhot's account was neither obscure in publication nor dry in its prose. Rather, the care he took was exploited by the publicists of *Tour du Monde*. The unveiling of the existence of Angkor to the West which took place in 1863 was a media event.

The dead Mouhot gained an instant public. It must have been a small readership by the standards of today but it was an early modern one.

<sup>17</sup> As above, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> Henri Mouhot, *Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China*, London 1864, Vol. 1, p. 275.



*Tour du Monde* was well printed, serious in appearance and often in content. Across Europe the subscribers to Mouhot's account were part of the new, dedicated middle classes: scientific Christians, who debated Darwin and developed a racialist sense of their own superiority, while being aware of their historic novelty in world terms. The dramatized revelation of Angkor's existence, while not a 'mass' media event, helped to symbolize France's civilizing mission. It held out the possibility of a marvellous cultural appropriation, to a self-conscious *public*. The visionary element in French colonial perspectives especially, was reinforced with regard to Cambodia. It was backed by a new social power from the start: added to the coercive persuasion of the gunboat was the ingredient of international publicity. From the moment it entered global consciousness Cambodia was spectacle.

Public opinion was guided by the state. Mouhot's account encouraged Napoleon III's minister in charge of colonial affairs, Chasseloup Loubat, to send an archaeologist, Doudart de Lagrée, out to represent France in Cambodia and examine Angkor. De Lagrée then headed a six-man mission to explore the Mekong, and follow the river's course up to China (1866–68). Included in the group was Francis Garnier, who had already played a pioneering role in advocating French possession of the southern delta provinces of Vietnam. De Lagrée was to die in the course of the expedition. Garnier (who himself was later killed in a premature assault on Northern Vietnam) oversaw the publication of its account in France, which also appeared first in *Tour du Monde*. Before setting out on the serious aspect of their exploration, the team visited Angkor. A photograph was taken of them, slouched in possessive pose across the steps of Angkor Wat. Their body language is unmistakable. They have composed themselves as if they were sitting in a nineteenth-century club, as though to say, 'Angkor is ours'.

Because Garnier's ambition was to persuade the French that they should redouble their enterprise in Indochina, he was far more of a conscious publicist than Mouhot and he played to the public. Garnier clearly sensed the advantage of a French 'discovery' of Angkor; it helped to justify the possessive way he and his colleagues felt about the place. To prove that it was previously completely unknown, before the French arrived, Garnier pointed out that the Parisian *Univers Illustré* of 1838 had not even mentioned Angkor;<sup>9</sup> what more needed to be said? When Mouhot's and Garnier's accounts appeared they were not perceived as a revelation of *what until then Europe had not known*. On the contrary (but not entirely without justification) they were seen as a demonstration of the Christian West's ability to find out. Ignorance and knowledge were thus neatly reversed. In an unquestioned instant, the French news of Angkor proved the blindness of the local people, unable even to get a reference into *Univers Illustré*. Those who had initially led the Europeans there would now be informed that it had been discovered. Indeed, it had been 'saved', saved, indeed, 'for

<sup>9</sup> Francis Garnier, *Notes sur le Voyage d'exploration effectué en Indo-Chine*, Paris 1869, p. 9.



them'. It was their history, and would meanwhile be held in trust. After all, they did not know what it meant.

A usurpation took place over the decades that followed. Europe's global and scientific knowledge was essential to it, for indeed the Khmer did not know what Angkor 'meant' historically. There *was* a sense in which the French knew 'better', as scholars certainly and as entrepreneurs (in the way that a tourist agent 'knows' the potential of a tropical beach better than those who live on it by fishing). Both forms of superiority were prefigured by Garnier, in a lush paragraph, redolent with French colonial mentality: 'The magnificent tropical vegetation which formed the decor for these imposing monuments gave a certain enchanting quality to their unexpected appearance in the middle of the forest, and to the unknown of the past, whose memory they suddenly evoked; both opened up the most vast field to the imagination where it could walk its dreams of civilization. I cannot describe what lively joy there is in this search for a still unexplored antiquity, one that European tourists do not recognize. Instead of travelling through places described a hundred times, following some chattering cicerone, to be one's own guide, to discover under the grass a sculpted frieze here, a stylobate further on, to try and reconstruct a destroyed building and to link it to already uncovered ruins, these were the kind of completely new emotions which we experienced in our walks.'<sup>20</sup> Like much of his description, Garnier's version of future tourists is an exaggerated, derivative version of Mouhot's observations.

### The Ideological Appropriation

The latter had ended his account of Angkor Wat with the comment that light would be thrown on the question of who built the temple and at what period, 'when some European savant shall succeed in deciphering' the inscriptions.<sup>21</sup> His presumption was sound. It would be, and at that time it could only have been, Western scholars such as George Coëdes who would be able to set about the historically exact decipherment of Angkor. In the process genuine discoveries were then made, archaeological and philological, and most of what we know about the history of the medieval Empire is owed to a brilliant school of French investigators. It is important, however, to distinguish this cumulative, scientific (even when wrong) uncovering, from the 'discovery' of Angkor itself in the late 1860s. All that the French found out then *was* that great buildings and choice carvings existed to the north of the Tonle Sap. That much *was already* known and appreciated by the indigenous peoples, who had named many of the statues and constructions. But what the French also knew immediately *was* that they as Westerners would be able systematically to penetrate the secrets of Angkor, to decipher the inscriptions, work out the dates, plot the extent of its dominion. This scholarly capacity greatly facilitated the ideological appropriation through which the French appeared as the temple savers, as the people who cried 'halt!' to its

---

<sup>20</sup> Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier, *Voyage d'exploration en Indo-Chine*, Paris 1873, Vol. 1, pp. 133-4.

<sup>21</sup> Pym edition, p. 93.

erosion, and hence also—by implication—to the destruction of the Khmer nation, 'saved' by colonialism.

There were two forms of French cultural superiority, scholarly and ideological, linked to the greater fire-power of its guns. One was an unquestionably more advanced, hence better knowledge. At the same time, the French explained *this* superior capacity through a soul-crushing, racist and culturalist system of thought; one which sought implicitly and explicitly to assert the innate superiority of the white race; which legitimized French political domination as it articulated 'the need' to take possession of countries like Cambodia. The idea that the French 'discovered' Angkor, hidden in the jungle, is part of this second, dominating ideology. But Mouhot's associated certainty when he was *taken* to the temple ruins, that Europeans would initiate the painstaking task of working out the material history of Angkor, cannot be rejected in like manner. It was true. Such knowledge, however, unlike the colonial ideology, sets in train a different kind of mastery, potentially open to all. Because it lays bare its own laws and errors, the political destination of analytic history can be legislated only temporarily by its practitioners, if at all—they may think that they are doing it for the glory of France, Thailand or Harvard, but their work might be best assimilated in Tokyo, Moscow, Phnom Penh or Yale. Once the challenge of its quality and actual objectivity is met, it is always possible for others to make scholarship their own, thus it can be separated from the imperialist impulse of its birth (or joined to another).

It is essential to make this proviso strongly, for in his classic, scorching assault on European 'orientalism' Edward Said hesitates somewhat at this line. Although its focus is the Middle East, Said's argument is of great help in understanding what happened in Cambodia. His aim is to demonstrate the intimate connection between the two forms of mastery of the East bestowed by the nineteenth century; those of knowledge and of domination, and the way the latter often distorts the former which then, with its element of spurious scientificity, itself helps to secure and extend the East's subordination. Said's central thesis is that the Europeans *invented* 'the Orient'. They created a range of racist theories, sexual stereotypes and forms of scholarship, which distributed global awareness into texts which thereafter elaborated not only 'a geographical distinction (the world is made up of two uneven halves, the Occident and the Orient) but also a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description... expresses a certain will to control, manipulate and incorporate what is manifestly different.'<sup>22</sup> Orientalism, a form of 'intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture',<sup>23</sup> Said argues, was also a crucial part of Europe's own self-consciousness: the West defined itself through its own vision of the East.

In part, the urgency of Orientalist concerns was connected to the

---

<sup>22</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York 1978, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> As above, p. 19.

religious crisis of nineteenth-century Europe, as the Bible began to be scrutinized by an expertise inimical to received truths. The origins of Christianity in a backward, semitic race; the sources of Renaissance enlightenment in pagan Greece and Rome: both became more problematic for upright, diligent, Christian, bourgeois Europeans. The East, especially the Near East, was seen as both older and younger than the West (Said refers to Goethe for this phrase). The East had had great Empires before Caesar even dreamt of conquering Gaul or Britain; it had seen the birth of Christianity itself. Yet it remained at that 'early' stage, or even declined from it, while Europe rose to colonize the world, as this had never been done before. With slavery just abolished and with child labour in the factories and massive prostitution around the corner, the new bourgeois, the first truly world class, were uneasily obsessed with collapse and decline, yet viewed the fall of Empires in the East as (naturally) a vindication of their own superiority.

### The European Worldview

Hegel, whom Said does not discuss, was an outstanding early advocate of such an outlook. For him, Europe's self-knowing subjectivity and the reconciliation of Church and State gave 'Freedom' the possibility of 'realizing its concept and its truth'.<sup>24</sup> In the Far East Hegel saw a specific phase: 'The splendour of the Oriental way lies before us', he said. '... This splendid edifice with its unified power, which nothing can escape and within which nothing can attain independent existence, is coupled with unrestrained arbitrariness... the political structures of Oriental substantiality are accompanied by wild hordes who descend from the verge of the uplands into the peaceful states. They lay them waste and destroy them... in the Orient... it is not the universal end but the sovereign who constitutes the state. As already remarked, this phase can be likened to that of childhood in general.'<sup>25</sup>

I have cited this passage because of its obvious resonance with how Angkor was immediately 'sensed' a generation *later* in Europe, when its existence became known there. That Angkor existed was an interesting surprise, but that something like Angkor could exist—the ruins of a despotic Oriental civilization discovered by Western explorers—was a splendid (in all senses) confirmation of the already existing European worldview. Whether or not they were consciously Hegelians, the French went to the Far East in the mid-nineteenth century with preconceptions 'ideally' fitted for Angkor. At the same time, such attitudes had been reinforced if not partially created by practical experience already accumulated in the Near East.

In particular, a great deal of work had been done in Egypt, where, Hegel stated, 'we encounter that contradiction of principles which it is the mission of the west to resolve'.<sup>26</sup> Egyptian Orientalism is one of

<sup>24</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction, Reason in History*, translated by H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge 1980, p. 208.

<sup>25</sup> As above, p. 201.

<sup>26</sup> As above.

the main objects of Said's study. In his brief occupation of Egypt (1798–99) Napoleon took with him French scholars who began the appropriation of artefacts and the systematic documentation of the remains of the ancient civilizations along the Nile. Said argues that the *Description de l'Égypte*, a massive multi-volume compendium of the expedition's findings, published over the following decades, was both a model and a prime source for Orientalism: for the intellectually organized 'appropriation' of the East. In a similar way, the discovery of the Rosetta Stone during the Napoleonic expedition, and the later decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics by Champollion, which it greatly aided, was a model of the way the mysteries of the East could be resolved. Thus by the 1860s in addition to such encompassing worldviews as Hegel's, European discovery of the East was already a quite extensive profession. When Mouhot gazed upon Angkor, without any idea as to its dates or history, he could be confident that future European scholars would one day read the inscriptions incomprehensible to himself, for that would not be as difficult an exercise as cracking the Egyptian hieroglyphs.

There was a further aspect to European Orientalism, also touched upon by Said and of great importance to Cambodia: namely, that it was not homogenous either scientifically or ideologically, but rather took on discernible national forms. In particular, the attitude of the British to the East was more philistine and pragmatic. Capital of the overwhelmingly dominant imperialism at mid-century, London was first concerned about how to exercise its rule. For the French, on the other hand, the general attitude of superiority towards the East was 'imbued with a sense of acute loss' at having been deprived of a position of power there, symbolized perhaps by the presence of the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum.<sup>27</sup> Evicted by their fellow imperialists, the French mentally elevated their attitudes towards the East in compensation, so as to insist all the more upon the need for their own civilizing mission: 'Theirs was the Orient of memories, suggestive ruins, forgotten secrets.'<sup>28</sup> Garnier's description of his visit to Angkor is an obvious example. The sense of loss was not confined to the East, however, for France itself had been the centre of a great Empire, briefly when the nineteenth century opened under Napoleon. When one reads French declamations about the way 'Cambodia' is a sadly fallen Empire it should be recalled that less than two generations before the French began to dominate Cambodia, their own dominion stretched right across mainland Europe. French chauvinism under Napoleon III, whose regime saw the initial conquests of Indochina, was given a special motivation by the desire to 're-establish' French greatness. In 1871, Napoleon III's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Prussians created a further specific wish to 'compensate' for defeat and to 'catch up with and emulate the British'. Thus as the French arrived in Cambodia, in the 1860s, and gained domination over it during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they imposed on the country an already formed, particularly intense and vigorously articulated 'Orientalism'. The Khmer—unlike the Vietnamese—did not have the

<sup>27</sup> Said, as cited, p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> As above, p. 170.

cultural resources to resist. The presence of Angkor especially, which France wrested from the Thais in 1907 and incorporated into a Cambodian polity, allowed the Europeans to transfer onto Cambodia a massive, pre-existing racist system of attitudes.

### Science and Colonialism

One example of the 'transfer' must suffice in lieu of an exhaustive study which might demonstrate its existence more exactly. Amongst the greatest French orientalist was Gaston Maspero, who gained the Paris Chair of Egyptology named after Champollion in 1874, when he was only 28. After working at the French archaeological school in Egypt he went on to publish a vast history of the fallen civilizations of the Eastern Mediterranean, from the Pharaohs to Byzantium. Gaston's son Henri moved his attention eastwards, to become a foremost expert on ancient China. Another son selected Cambodia. In 1904 Georges Maspero published the first attempt at a synoptic review of the history of Angkor, *L'Empire Khmer*. It is dedicated to his father, in a tribute which evokes a succession of generations who devoted themselves to unravelling the mysteries of the East's greatness and decline.

The introduction to *L'Empire Khmer* is revealing. Georges Maspero presents his readers with a long quotation from a French explorer, published in 1899, who wrote: 'Seated, through the torrid afternoon, in the shade of the highest sanctuary of the "Ruins of Angkor Wat", the traveller allows his thoughts to roam along with the distant litanies chanted by bonzes in yellow robes. "Who built this prodigious edifice, he wonders? The Khmers, they tell us! . . . This is all the information furnished us by historians and ethnographers. A name of a nation, nothing more. Useless to ask the name of the monarch who gave orders to these stone-movers; . . . I do not know of any analogy in history, to these shadows covering a civilization as advanced as that which seems to have been that of the Khmers. . . ." Maspero then responds. There is no longer any mystery: he, Maspero, has compiled an account based on existing researches, which will answer the inquiring dreamer. The text that follows is an effort to compose a scholarly history, however faulty. In this sense it lies with the invaluable cumulative knowledge of 'Orientalism' whatever the company it kept. But the juxtaposition of scientific account with the patently colonial introduction bears out a central part of Said's argument. For in this way Maspero junior serves to legitimize the traveller's attitudes, to reinforce the patronizing relationship to the Khmer which they entail. To understand the effect of such material, one may attempt to imagine what it would have been like for an educated Cambodian to have picked up Maspero's volume and to have arrived at the exclamation mark on page one: 'the Khmers, they tell us!'

Over the past century, the Khmer have had impressed upon them a colonial definition of their nation, with crippling effects on their nationalism. It is not that the French 'invented' Cambodia. On the contrary, they were attempting to invent 'Indochina' which, like Indonesia or Nigeria, would have been a strictly imperialist state construction. In the process of trying to incorporate Cambodia, however,

French influence generated an acutely demoralizing version of the Khmer past, at the centre of which it placed the construction of Angkor. It functioned to humble the leaders of the present population. Of course, Angkor was, and would have remained, within the symbolic definition of Cambodia's self-consciousness (just as it did when the temples were within Thai borders until 1907). But for the French, the *defining* peculiarity of the Khmer race was that it was a fallen nation.

It is a theme that found crude expression in André Malraux's second novel, *The Royal Way*. In the 1920s he had sailed to Cambodia with an audacious scheme to steal some Angkorean remains. As he was to end his career overseeing the restoration of the buildings of Paris, the whole story has a special irony. The novel, which was published in 1930, recounts the adventure of a youthful connoisseur who seeks his fortune through the discovery of unknown sculptural masterpieces in the Cambodian jungle. He aims to take them to Paris, to sell. The 'Royal Way' refers to an overgrown imperial road, north from Angkor. It is unexplored; dangerous tribes and mortal diseases lie in wait in the surrounding forest. It was once the major artery of a glorious civilization, now it crawls with loathsome difficulties, and along it temples of art may be uncovered. The central image of the novel is a journey down this once Royal, now decayed route, which ends in death. The theme is hardly more than a soliloquy on the mortality of the individual, transferred to a dramatic setting. Perhaps Malraux strove hard for the philosophic in the novel because of the base nature of the experience that took him to Cambodia in the first place. He had read a report in the *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient* which described a small temple to the north of Angkor, uncovered only in 1914. It was noteworthy, the report stated, for 'the remarkable perfection of execution and extraordinary finesse and interest of the sculpture'.<sup>29</sup> Malraux realized that the site was not being excavated. He reckoned that it counted as abandoned property and could thus be looted with impunity. In 1923, he went to Angkor, then took a companion to the temple, Bantay Srei. They cut out of its sandstone a ton of the finest statues and cornices. But they were arrested in possession of the historic treasure as they tried to leave Cambodia. Malraux was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Although he never went to jail, Malraux was not greatly impressed with what he saw.<sup>30</sup> In his novel he expresses his feelings for the stench of the waters; the repulsive insects that crawl across the stones, or fall from the jungle onto sensitive hands and skin. The country appeared to him to be in 'decomposition', it was 'a dead land amid the dead'.<sup>31</sup>

### Political Projections

There is a sense in which Malraux looked at Cambodia in the way that someone might look upon the Scottish highlands and declare them

<sup>29</sup> Henri Parmentier, 'L'Art d'Indravarman', *B.E.F.E.O.*, 1919, p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> For an account of the whole episode, Walter Langlois, *André Malraux, the Indochina Adventurer*, New York 1966. The shameful events continued to cause embarrassment; for example, in a history of Bantay Srei by Henri Marchal (*B.E.F.E.O.*, 1965, p. 280) reference is made to a 'theft' in 1923. But no mention is made of the fact that the thief was at that very time the Minister of Culture in Paris.

<sup>31</sup> *Le Voie Royale*, Paris 1930, p. 48.

bleak and desolate, as if this were a natural landscape and not the result of the historic evictions which cleared the land of humans for sheep to graze. While he could dissect with contempt the petty features of authority in Saigon, Malraux did not discern the full extent of French responsibility for the state of 'decomposition' he witnessed in Cambodia. Colonial economic policy was reducing the lower reaches of the Mekong and its great lake to a hinterland of the new city of Saigon. Cambodia was taxed while the delta was developed. What Malraux saw as lassitude was as much subjugation as exhaustion; the decay of the Royal Way his own projection of French superiority.

That European expressions of lament over the fate of the Khmer and their civilization were not neutral or objective, but political, can be proved through comparison with Vietnam. There, mandarin traditions of literacy had created a society with a strong historical consciousness of itself, in relation to China especially. There could be no denying a 'Vietnamese nation'. Yet this is *precisely* what the French attempted. They chopped up the country into three statelets within Indochina and even outlawed use of the word 'Vietnam' and called the inhabitants 'Annamites'. Just as they thus denied the existence of a nationalism felt to be inconvenient if not threatening in Vietnam, despite its reality, so the French encouraged a version of national identity in Cambodia for all its implausibility. They did both for the same reason: to help them secure their own hegemony.

In Vietnam, the policy of divide and rule ultimately disarmed the collaborating strata. It thereby helped to open the way for the Communists who were the only nationalist organization with a nation-wide presence. The revolutionaries were also able to draw independently upon their country's past. For example, General Giap could write about Nguyen Trai, who was a fifteenth-century 'theorist' of the Vietnamese state. Here, a revolutionary's European education has been appropriated to affect a self-mastery, independent of France. This achievement would not have been possible for the Vietnamese had they not had their own access to historic Vietnamese-language texts. It was precisely such a relationship that was not available to the Khmers. Yet their Thai neighbours also had a long, known history. In this Asian context, the Khmers felt it imperative to have one too, for the definition of their own identity. (It is not a prerequisite for *all* independence movements. In a discussion of Cambodia and Vietnam, a Mozambique nationalist once expressed to me his complete incomprehension of Asian comrades who regarded a thousand-year-old history as relevant.) The trap the Khmer found themselves in was that it seemed impossible for them to deny the importance of Angkor. To do so might fatally diminish them, and anyway there were medieval Khmer inscriptions upon its walls. Yet there was no way to effect such continuity. Between the 14th and the 18th centuries, the state-sponsored, caste-based Hindu society of Angkor had given way to Theravada Buddhism; the Khmer's capital had shifted from the northern shores of Tonle Sap; even the language had changed structurally—lengthy Thai domination having led to 'the replacement of Angkorean syntax by its Thai counterpart'.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, as cited, p. 97.

Thus the first generations of Khmer to absorb modern education were unable to contest French interpretation of the archaeological remains. To accept it, however, meant agreeing that the Khmer were a finished people, unqualified for independence and suitable only for provincial incorporation into 'Indochina'. To combat this, on the other hand, by attempting to reassert the old greatness also took Angkor as the starting point. Both views judged the present by *that* past: they were contradictory, yet shared the assumption most functional for colonial rule. Voluntarism replaced submissiveness, with equally little foundation. The fateful idea of Angkor's hydraulic system may be taken as an example.

### Visions of Water

In 1958, B.P. Groslier published an analysis of research based on aerial survey pictures of the region around Angkor. These allowed a pattern of extensive canals and waterways to be traced, linked to massive *barays*, or artificial reservoirs. Groslier concluded that the system assured a continuous water supply to the fields, in the time of Angkor. The climate in Cambodia is marked by two things: a very even, extremely high temperature, and a very marked seasonal variation in rainfall: with heavy monsoons in some months and a desiccating dry season in others. Groslier argued that the Angkoreans had exploited the potential of the sun and resolved the discrepancy of the rains, by capturing the monsoon waters to create a constant water supply, one which 'permitted the permanent irrigation of ricefields'.<sup>33</sup> The harvests thus generated produced the surplus which allowed for the creation of the temple mountains. The 'vision' was highly thought of in Cambodia and was certainly well known in Francophone circles, such as those that Pol Pot, his wife and colleagues moved in, as well as Sihanouk who immediately declared the need for a 'politique de l'eau'. There is a telling description of it in a book called, like Malcolm MacDonald's, *Angkor*, only this time it is a leftist account. Its author, Jan Myrdal, later, for a time, a defender of the Pol Pot regime, writes that the irrigation system of medieval Angkor 'multiplied the crops and produced an enormous surplus... the great canals reached out over the plains, the water of immense dams glittered in the sunlight, rice paddy upon rice paddy stretching away to the horizon'.<sup>34</sup> One might almost believe that he had seen it himself.

However, further calculation has shown that the theory was inaccurate. A Bangkok-based hydrologist has asserted in a brief paper that there is almost no evidence of multi-crop irrigation. The *barays* did not hold nearly enough water, the dams had no mechanisms to control the release of water. A hydraulic system existed, but it functioned to hold back the monsoon rains. It thus increased and extended the wet-season harvest only; the *barays* supplied year round drinking water

<sup>33</sup> B.P. Groslier, *Angkor et le Cambodge au XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècle d'après les sources portugaises et espagnoles*, Paris 1958, p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle (who took the photographs), *Angkor, an Essay on Art and Imperialism*, New York 1970, pp 76-77.



for the city inhabitants and animals.<sup>35</sup> While there was intensive, irrigated rice agriculture, in no way had the Angkorean system managed to abolish seasonal production by permitting the 'permanent' irrigation alleged by Groslier. In response, under a smokescreen of rhetoric, Groslier conceded the argument. Although he makes no self-criticism and appears to be arguing the point against some other author politely unnamed, he accepts that 'it is not evident that they [Angkoreans] were trying for or that they might have achieved a permanent irrigation.'<sup>36</sup>

In terms of academic entertainment this rates quite highly. Alas, more was involved. The Angkorean dream entertained by the Pol Potists, for which tens of thousands of Cambodians died as they slaved building canals, was in large part historical fantasy. Many Cambodian nationalists believed intensely that Angkor had been the site of an unsurpassed agricultural revolution; the Khmer Rouge set about 're-creating' that past greatness through forced labour. The collapse of Groslier's theory allows one to see how ultra-nationalist interpretation of their own 'historic identity' was formed by spurious European constructions.

### L'Etat, C'Est Moi

It was not a simple or unmediated imposition. The French were able to imprint their influence inside 'the Khmer soul' because they gained the collaboration of the Royal Court. The kings were the indigenous sanction for colonialism, and the conduit for its hegemony. French rule was exercised 'indirectly' as the monarchs kept nominal office. However, this allowed for an extremely direct and deep ideological impression from Europe. In effect, the French created a colonial monarchy.<sup>37</sup> After 1945, it was King (later Prince) Norodom Sihanouk who 'Cambodianized' the idea of his people's epochal decline. He gave full sanction to the Angkorean legend on the one hand, and praised the French for saving Cambodia on the other. He projected himself as the reincarnation of Jayavarman VII, and had his profile photographically compared to that of the great Emperor.<sup>38</sup> Early French studies of Angkor, including one by Groslier's father, carried

<sup>35</sup> W.J. Van Liere, 'Traditional Water Management in the Lower Mekong Basin', *World Archaeology*, Vol. II, No 3, Fall 1980, pp. 265-280.

<sup>36</sup> B.P. Groslier, 'La Cité hydraulique angkoriennne: Exploitation ou surexploitation du sol?', in B.E.F.E.O., 1979, p. 161.

<sup>37</sup> A symbol of this was spotted by Norman Lewis in one of the pagodas in the Royal Palace. He was struck by 'the genial cynicism with which the French had sent the reigning king, when they had taken over his country, a statue of himself . . . only all they had done was to find a spare statue of Napoleon III, knock the head off and replace it with one of the Cambodian monarch roughly chiselled-up from a portrait'. *A Dragon Apparent*, London 1951 and 1982, p. 211.

<sup>38</sup> There is a brief discussion of Sihanouk's Angkorean ideology in Roger Smith, 'Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia', *Asia Survey* June 1967. Charles Meyer, who was a close adviser to the Prince, says that the peasant believed in his divinity: 'He is the successor to the god-kings of Angkor—and, perhaps, deep down in himself, he believes a little in what his own simple people believe that he is.' Introduction to Norodom Sihanouk, *Souvenirs d'un roi d'Angkor*, Paris 1981, p. II.

plates of Khmer faces to show that the physiognomy of the natives resembled that of Angkor's sculpture. Sihanouk elevated this device to show the world a king. Similarly, Sihanouk would say, 'if the French had arrived here [in Cambodia] twenty years later than they did during their period of colonial expansion in the nineteenth century there would not have been any Cambodia left for them to occupy'.<sup>39</sup> This and similar statements are of dubious worth. But for Sihanouk, both a political notion of Cambodia's Angkorean origins and an endorsement of the French role in 'saving' the country, were highly convenient. Each gave added force to his attempt to personalize Khmer history. A French fascist admiral had placed him on the throne when he was eighteen years old and by no means in line to be king. To recover from this inauspicious beginning, Sihanouk exaggerated his legitimacy. In a speech made at a turning point in his regime, in 1963, he stated that 'my compatriots venerate me with the respect of a god and hold me as a "sacred character" . . . the truth is that more than five million Khmers identify totally with Sihanouk. To injure, to wound, to humiliate me, is to strike at the Cambodian nation.'<sup>40</sup> Sihanouk's *La Nation, C'est Moi* was echoed by a small chorus of foreign fans. For one, 'Cambodia is Sihanouk'; for another, 'If there had been no Sihanouk in all probability there would be no Cambodia today.'<sup>41</sup> We are not told where it would have gone.

Yet a cold look at such demagoguery allows us to see why in fact Sihanouk consistently emphasized the alarming possibility of Cambodia's demise. *He was talking about himself.* Thus, in 1961 he informed America's prestigious Asia Society that, 'Our survival as a free and sovereign nation [read, 'my survival'] depends entirely on preserving the equilibrium and friendship with the two blocs. The day we find ourselves facing only one all-powerful bloc, the days of our independence, perhaps even of our very existence, will be counted.'<sup>42</sup> This is only a mild version of a constant theme, namely that Cambodia without Sihanouk will be 'devoured', 'swallowed' and otherwise disappear. Sometimes Sihanouk struck a heroic posture as in 1958: 'If the moment comes when we must die or be taken over by the Communists, we will accept inevitable death with the conviction of not having betrayed our country.' Three years later, his attitude was altogether more pragmatic: 'I shall not hesitate when the time comes for me to yield to Communism, to prepare our people and myself to become Communists, to prevent the dispute of our unity and the shedding of blood.'<sup>43</sup> Whether he struck a pose of bravado or suppleness, Sihanouk's vision was always unrelentingly self-serving. In particular he tried to fuse the destiny of his nation with his own role as its head of state, displacing attention from his personal vulnerability with obsessive

<sup>39</sup> Dennis Bloodworth, *An Eye for the Dragon, Southeast Asia Observed, 1954-70*, New York 1970, p. 273.

<sup>40</sup> *La Rejet de l'aide américaine, trois exposés de . . . Norodom Sihanouk*, Phnom Penh 1963, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Shaplen, *Time Out of Hand*, New York 1970, p. 307; Bloodworth, as cited, p. 127.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Roger Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy*, Ithaca 1965, p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, as above, p. 110; Michael Leifer, *Cambodia: the Search for Security*, London 1967, p. 128.

concern for Cambodia's 'existence'. Thus it was not entirely without justification when the Thais denounced Sihanouk's 'threadbare stratagem of playing the role of victim'.<sup>44</sup> By collapsing the Angkorean myth into his own person, and presenting his survival as equivalent to that of the nation's, Sihanouk especially brought home the idea that Cambodia was close to extinction.

There were indeed real threats to the Prince from the Thai and the South Vietnamese regimes, which, with US help, launched attempts to rid Cambodia of Sihanouk. The Prince was especially skilful at exploiting such foreign pressures, at amplifying them so as to whip up support for himself. Yet however skilful, he could not have managed opinion so well had he not also been drawing upon an already felt anxiety for the country's future. A generalized, nationalist concern that Cambodia might disappear existed. In 1945 it was directed against the return of the French (whom the Court actually invited back). Yet those who were anti-French had not perhaps realized how much of their fear of Cambodia's possible 'death' had been drummed into them by the French themselves.

From his melodramatic 'personification' of the nation to his Gaullist-style diplomacy, Sihanouk was, and remains, the incarnation of the French myth of Cambodia. The creature of colonialism, he genuinely made its inheritance his own when he became the founder of the country's diplomatic independence in 1956. It is this—the *reality* of Sihanouk's claims upon the country and his one-time popularity among the peasantry—that makes it doubly difficult to escape the tentacles of the French myths as they were reproduced after self-government. When Pol Pot and the extremist wing of the Khmer Rouge took up the armed struggle against Sihanouk in the mid sixties, they projected themselves as the only true protagonists of Khmer nationalism. The Prince, they insisted, was a false nationalist, his rule a façade of independence. But their radical nationalism too was expressed within the parameters of the French ideal. Hence the symbiotic relationship between Pol Pot and the Prince. Pol Pot's objective was (and remains) to replace Sihanouk as the country's 'true' saviour. As a student in Paris in 1952, Pol Pot signed himself 'The Original Khmer'.<sup>45</sup> Of course, to be a country's 'Saviour' means that it must be in need of saving; must be under dire threat. Contestants within the same game of 'rescuing' Cambodia, Pol Pot and Sihanouk needed and still need each other to ensure that their contest continues to be played.

### Threats, Real and Imaginary

But hasn't Cambodia been threatened with extinction, or at least with the dismantling of its national sovereignty? If French colonialism had been granted a further lease of life, it might have incorporated the

---

<sup>44</sup> Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman speaking on 1 August 1963; *Foreign Affairs Bulletin*, Bangkok, August/September 1963, p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, Verso, London 1985, p. 26, and the following pages for a picture of the intermingling of the Royal and revolutionary elites.

Khmer and Lao into an Indochina run by an elite schooled at the Lycées of Hanoi and Saigon (where Sihanouk was educated). But after Cambodia gained independence in 1956 there was no threat to its continuation as a nation more or less influenced by other nations. Neither the illegal, brutal destruction of Nixon's and Kissinger's extension of the Vietnam war into Cambodia, nor the extreme Stalinist terror imposed upon the society by Pol Pot, threatened Cambodia's existence. On the contrary, it was precisely because there was a viable, living human society of Khmer that US policy (and Chinese consent) were criminal. Nor were the Vietnamese invasion of 1979 and the occupation that followed a 'colonial' subjugation. Hanoi mishandled its diplomacy after 1975, in part because its incorporation of South Vietnam was undemocratic and its domestic policy generally vacillating and regressive. But the Pol Pot regime needed military mobilization to enforce its tyranny and launched unprovoked attacks over its southern border. Vietnam acted in self-defence and has proved capable of seeking a normalization of relations with a separate Cambodia.

Yet when a West German journalist went to see Sihanouk in March 1979, shortly after he had been evacuated from Phnom Penh in front of the advancing Vietnamese troops, they 'all agreed... that Cambodia's last hope of survival lay in Prince Sihanouk.'<sup>46</sup> Shortly after, the Prince dedicated his memoir 'To my beloved Khmer people... *now in its death throes* due to the unchecked conflict between two types of Communism'.<sup>47</sup> In his review of this volume Michael Field (who once worked for Sihanouk's English-language service) concluded that only the Prince had the slightest chance of presiding over an international settlement 'which could save the Khmer race from the extinction which now threatens it'.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Field had forgotten that in his own memoir he had reflected on the abiding energy and endurance of the Khmer, and had cited the peasant saying: *Srok Khmer min del saen*.<sup>49</sup> It is also quoted in an essay on Cambodia's struggle for independence by Sokhom Hing, written when he was the unofficial representative of the Sihanouk/Pol Pot front at the UN in New York, between 1970 and 1975.<sup>50</sup> It means literally 'Cambodia will never be nothing', that is: Cambodia will never disappear.

It may have been a sign of the frightful trials they were obliged to undergo, that the Khmer felt the need for such reassurance. But the contrast between it and the French/Sihanouk/Pol Pot projection of Cambodia on the verge of extinction is considerable. Sokhom Hing was one of the many dedicated nationalists who were swept up in the anti-American alliance and then became its victims after 1975. Perhaps the best known today is Hun Sen, who managed to flee. Sokhom Hing was not so fortunate. In 1976, Thiounn Prasit, who became what

<sup>46</sup> Peter Schule-Latour, *Death in the Rice Fields*, London 1981, p. 347.

<sup>47</sup> *War and Hope, the Case for Cambodia*, New York 1980.

<sup>48</sup> *New York Review of Books*, 23 October 1980, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Field, *The Prevailing Wind: Witness in Indochina*, London 1965, p. 166.

<sup>50</sup> Sokhom Hing, 'An Essay on Cambodia's Struggle for Independence', in Joseph Fischer, ed., *Foreign Values and Southeast Asian Scholarship*, Berkeley 1973, p. 163.

he remains to this day, the permanent representative of 'Democratic Kampuchea' at the United Nations, instructed Sokhom Hing to return to Phnom Penh. Instead of receiving the training he was promised, he went to a forced labour camp and then to the interrogation centre at Tuol Sleng. There, in October 1976, he confessed that he had adopted 'a revisionist line in working, in eating, in morale, in attitude. For example, promoting the idea of wanting to eat different kinds of food . . . I would always talk a lot, joke a lot, about this, about that . . . to slow down the work. This was a betrayal of the revolutionary organization which tries to promote the country's construction movement.' Two months later, according to the prison files, Sokhom Hing was exterminated.<sup>21</sup>

I wrote about this in the *New Statesman* nearly ten years ago, and many others protested then and since that if there were any principles in the conduct of international affairs, then the likes of Thiounn Prasit could not be voted back year, after year, after year, to sit alongside representatives of our countries at the UN. But he was. The statesmen and women of the West have allowed a little room in their bed for the Khmer Rouge because they really don't care at all whether Cambodia survives, except as a means of serving their own perceived interests. To cover their cynicism, they are shameless enough to proclaim that its 'survival' is their heartfelt concern. But its survival isn't in question. Not because of 'the international community' but thanks to the tenacity of the Khmer villagers, who long ago walked away from the fabulous constructions of Angkor saying '*Srok Khmer min del saan*'.

© Anthony Barnett  
February 1990

---

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Barnett, 'Don't Blame Me, It Was My Brother-in-Law', *New Statesman*, 7 August 1981, reproduced in John Pilger and Anthony Barnett, *Aftermath: the Struggle of Cambodia and Vietnam*, London 1981, pp 130-31.

# CATALYST

## SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

'The left has been fighting in an arena designed by its enemies. Let *Catalyst* turn the stadium lights on, so that the strugglers see where they really are.' NEAL ASCHERSON

### CATALYST • THE NEW MAGAZINE OF THE RADICAL LEFT • OUT NOW

Incorporating *Interlink* magazine. Published for the Socialist Society and the Conference of Socialist Economists.

**SUBSCRIBE NOW, AND RECEIVE A FREE COPY OF THE NEW SOCIALIST SOCIETY PUBLICATION**

**NEGOTIATING THE RAPIDS: SOCIALIST POLITICS FOR THE 1990s**

Subscription rates: one year (6 issues) £7.20 / two years (12 issues) £13.00

Send cheque/PO to CATALYST (NLN), 284A-286A SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, LONDON N4 2AA

## Libris

IN PAPERBACK

François Lafitte  
**The Internment of Aliens**  
*new edition*

*'a... very remarkable book... In its pages of close research, political analysis and agonised reporting lay a story which made the British wince with shame'* – Neal Acherson, *Observer*

This book tells the story of what happened to the German, Austrian and Italian exiles and refugees in Britain in 1940 when over 50,000 people were indiscriminately interned.

ISBN 1 870352 96 3 £8.95

Gwyn A. Williams  
**Artisans and Sans-Culottes:**  
Popular Movements in  
France and Britain  
during the French Revolution  
*new edition*

*'enthralling... as good an introduction to 1789 and its aftermath as any reader in any continent could wish'* – Michael Foot, *Independent*

ISBN 1 870352 80 7 £7.95

Goethe  
**Roman Elegies and The Diary**  
*verse translation (with original German on facing pages) by David Luke. Introduction by Hans R. Vaget.*

*'A handsome volume, by an excellent translator and an enlightened commentator'* – David Constantine, *Guardian*

The complete texts of two of Goethe's greatest poems, often suppressed or bowdlerized.

ISBN 1 870352 20 3 £9.95

Libris  
10 Burghley Road  
London NW5 1UE

## Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism

As so many other theories originating in Paris in the postwar years, 'French feminism' enjoys a high profile in the international marketplace of ideas. Psychoanalytic and linguistic theories, celebrations of 'difference', the conjunction of the sexual and the symbolic, essentialism presented in the terms of poststructuralism, all appear in the Anglo-Saxon world as a highly exotic import. Yet the Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray known abroad are only a minuscule sample of the French feminisms which developed in the 1970s, and to understand the women's movement it is necessary to look far beyond the texts of a few Parisian thinkers. This article maps the ways in which the women's movement, as one of the most important legacies of the events of May-June 1968, brought an efflorescence of analyses and politics that influenced the thought and practice of the Left as a whole. Yet in recent years the media—especially around March 8th or in the doldrum months of summer—have frequently announced the end of feminism, even as feminists themselves reassess their experiences.<sup>1</sup> There has been a substantial decline

in the visibility and activity of anything which might merit the name of 'movement'. This experience of decline, in the face of substantial social change as well as of major initiatives by capital to reorganize the conditions under which women and men live in and outside the paid labour force, compels us to present some theoretical propositions about new social movements. What is the legacy of the movements which appeared in economic crisis and were important actors in the political crisis of the last two decades?

It is important, first, to lay to rest any notion that social change has made a women's movement and feminist politics either inevitable or irrelevant. There were as many women in the crowds at the Sorbonne and in the streets in 1968 as there were in the strike of *lycéens* in 1986. Yet, in 1986 there were many more young women in the leadership of the student movement, just as there are in the anti-racist movement and on the electoral lists of Left political parties. Social change putting girls into higher education predated the women's movement, but it took a decade of mobilization by their mothers and/or older sisters before the girls of 1986 could claim places as leaders. At the same time, many of these young women face a much less promising future than that of the earlier generation, just as their mothers and sisters now face an economic system which is restructuring around the 'marginal' work of women. Economic crisis and restructuring have been hard on women. Female unemployment rates are higher than men's and the wage gap continues. Young women entering the labour force face a longer period of unemployment than do young men and they are more likely to have to take part-time and/or temporary work. Two decades of feminism have thus not made it possible to counteract the gender biases regenerated in the current economic crisis.

### Politics and Representation

Given this story it is important to locate the women's movement politically. And in order to do that it is necessary to think more generally about politics and *representation*. Politics, as broadly defined here, comprises actors' efforts to carve out a constituency for themselves by mobilizing support for their preferred formulation of their own collective identity (and often that of their protagonists) and for the enumeration of their interests, which follows from that collective identity. This definition depends upon an understanding of the dual aspects of representation. One type denotes actors' *representation of self*

<sup>1</sup> A number of important recent collections have assessed the decline of the women's movement and attempted to look to the future. See, for example, the collective book, *Ruptures... et féminisme en devenir*, Paris, VOIX OFF, imprimerie de femmes put out by the Collective Ruptures and *Le Féminisme... ringard?*, special issue of Bulletin d'Information des Etudes Féminines (BIEF), #20-21, 1989. The latter is a series of essays in response to the question of whether feminism has become 'ringard', a word which can be translated alternatively as valueless or out-moded. The issue includes a report of a colloquium held in Paris in April 1988, a collective reflection by yet another group of feminists. For the views of two *féministes historiques* on the situation see Françoise Picq, *Le Mouvement de libération des femmes et ses effets sociaux*, ATP, Recherches Féministes et Recherches sur les Femmes, 1987, pp. 94-100, and Maya Sarduts, 'Itinéraire' *Cahiers du Féminisme*, #41-42, 1987, pp. 17-18.



to others, via a collective identity. A second type, familiar from the language of liberal democracy, is the *representation of interests*—a process which, since the emergence of the modern state, has included representation to the state through more or less stable organizations. These two senses are closely linked by the fact that both involve *power*, the power to give meaning to social relations and thereby to represent 'interests'.

Representation of self—that is, a collective identity—involves, among other things, naming oneself, since only an actor with a name is recognizable to others. As a consequence, social relations become visible and a range of political strategies emerges. Since the birth of the labour movement, for example, workers in many countries—but not all—have striven for the right to be named the 'working class' and a fundamental protagonist in the struggle of man and nature. In those places or times where struggle has not formed classes, the names differ and the perception of social relations is very different.<sup>2</sup> In some places organizations of workers have engaged with capitalists to represent a social relation which is one not of antagonism but of co-operation, one not of polarization but of diversity. The particular outcome, in each place and time, has resulted from a process of negotiated mutual recognition, in a conflict over naming which has depended on the power of each actor in the social relation to impose a name or to push the other closer towards a preferred formulation. From this example we see the importance of representation in the first sense, as it relates to collective identities.

Representation of interests is also part of this process, of course. Resolution of basic questions about who the main protagonists are to be in turn places broad limits on the definition of interests, on disputed claims about who gets what, when and how. For example, whether workers make claims simply for amelioration of their wages or whether they encode their demands in strategies for revolutionary transformation does not depend simply on the objective interests of workers but on the ways in which they depict their situation in their representations to employers and the state.

Because actors with a variety of collective identities co-exist in the universe of political discourse, their practices and meaning systems jostle each other for social attention and legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> At any moment an advanced capitalist democracy has only a limited number of meaningful 'political discourses', that is, sets of salient ideas which organize debate, communication and action within and among political organizations and between those organizations and their constituencies and/or clients. Political discourses are packages of four connected clusters of ideas—those providing a map of the contours of the social world; practical schemes to change that world in the immediate; utopian

<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration of this argument and empirical analysis see Janine Brodie and Jane Jenson, *Crisis, Challenge and Change: Party and Class in Canada Revisited*, Ottawa 1988.

<sup>3</sup> For an elaboration of the concept of 'universe of political discourse', see Jane Jenson, 'Gender and Reproduction: Or, Babies and the State', *Studies in Political Economy*, # 20, 1986.

visions of an improved world; and, finally, understandings about how to do politics.

At issue are conflicts over the representation and reproduction of power relations based on difference. In any social formation a multitude of relationships of difference exist. Age, sex, race, property ownership, workplace activities and language are but a few of the differences which might take on social meaning. In many cases inequality of power accompanies recognition of difference. For example, the recognition of childhood is usually accompanied by the subordination of children to adults. The recognition of racial difference has led to all the evils of racism. Nevertheless, it is also obvious that the mere existence—or even recognition—of difference does not automatically lead to congealment of a system of unequal power. Such a system is socially constructed. Thus, progressive social forces have struggled against the divisive effects of racism and property ownership in the name of equality, positing a universality of human dignity against inequities of power structured around these differences. Similarly, sexual difference may cross all other relations, such that things 'female' are subordinated to things 'male', or such a process of differentiation may be effaced through political actions of resistance in the name of equality in difference.

### Institutional Actors

Any exploration of the process of naming differences demonstrates that the emergence of collective actors is not automatic and that not all collective identities can gain attention because actors are not equally powerful in their own social contexts. Instead actors depend for their influence on their ability to contribute to the institutionalization of systems of practices and meanings, through their contribution to political discourse.

Crucial to the creation and reproduction of political discourse, therefore, are institutional actors in parties, unions, professional associations, the media, the state, intellectual circles and social movements. These political discourses are the product of the action of institutions engaged in their everyday activities. As such, the universe of political discourse is one of flux and challenge. Institutional actors must constantly respond both to societal changes and to challenges from others proposing alternative ideational packages and definitions of the identities of collective actors. Ultimately, then, any particular discourse may persist even in the face of challenge, may decline after being defeated by its challengers, or may evolve into something new.

Since organizational actors all have a specific history, shaped by their particular experience with their national institutions and balance of political forces, actors will differ across time and space in their discursive representations of self and of interests. Such variation even encompasses actors who might all fall under the general label of 'women' or 'workers'. No women's movement, no workers' movement will promote precisely the same discourse or forge precisely the same collective identities. Therefore, analysis of each national case

needs to provide names for actors which reflect their own presentation of self; general typologies cannot serve.

The contemporary French women's movement has consisted of three wings: revolutionary feminism, syndicalist feminism and egalitarian feminism. Since 1968 the theory, practice and alliance situation of each differed, and so too did their ability to shape the political discourse and inject a new representation of women into French politics. This article demonstrates the ways in which the three wings of the movement competed to formulate new political discourses about 'women', 'politics' and even 'revolution'.

In the past 'women', as independent actors, had no place in French political discourse. Women were always located according to their family status—as mothers, wives, sisters, etc.—or according to their participation as 'female workers' in the labour force. The originality of the post-1968 women's movement was to insist on the existence of a new collective identity and to force other political actors to respect this new definition. Yet, the women's movement was not united in its use of any one discourse or in promoting one collective identity. Great divergencies in their maps of the social world, practical schemas, utopian visions, and strategies for doing politics resulted in serious conflict, which affected the extent to which the movement could prevail against other actors promoting their own visions of gender relations. Even during its moment of greatest strength in the 1970s, the French women's movement was unusually schismatic and sectarian. Internal divisions, which consumed enormous reserves of energy, weakened the movement as well as provoking important theoretical debates. To a large extent such fragmentation followed from French feminism's links to different and deeply divided parts of a Left which was itself rapidly changing.

### Revolutionary Feminism

Revolutionary feminism provided the centre of gravity of the French women's movement, the fulcrum on which all three parts balanced. This wing directly descended from the Maoism, Trotskyism and *autogestionnaire* politics of the major fractions of the extreme Left in France after 1968. Improvements in state policies have been neither the goal nor the consequence of its activities: rather, it has stressed revolutionary transformation in relations between women and men, via cultural change and the construction of new social relations.<sup>4</sup>

Revolutionary feminism made major contributions to the universe of political discourse of the turbulent 1970s. Although the several tendencies within this wing of French feminism had quite different schemes for practical work, they shared an analysis which denied that sexuality and gender relations could be subordinated to any other social relation, in which the utopian future would be one in which

---

<sup>4</sup> For a description and critique of this avoidance of the state, see Christine Delphy, 'Les Femmes et l'État', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, # 6-7, 1984 and Picq, *Le Mouvement*, Appendix 1.

women would be not only recognized but revalued, and in which the way to do politics was for women to organize in autonomous, women-only groups. Overall, this discursive package amounted to a new collective identity of 'women', defined in terms of sexual difference as a group with bonds which crossed other social differences, especially those of class. Nevertheless, even though there was a general and shared contribution to the universe of political discourse, the everyday life of revolutionary feminism was lived as one of immense conflict over all four elements of the movement's discourse.

In 1970 the Parisian press baptised groups of women who wanted to reconsider *their* experience of 1968 the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (MLF).<sup>5</sup> Discussions broke out about women's silence in political meetings as well as the insults thrown at them by their male comrades, then moved on to efforts to understand the social, political and psychological reasons for women's oppression more generally.<sup>6</sup> The results were the tumultuous women-only General Assemblies which met at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and at which high theoretical debate raged among emerging 'stars' and was eagerly followed by the partisans of each position.<sup>7</sup>

The influence of the post-1968 extreme Left is clear in the early discourse and actions of the movement. Maoist groups, which provided several of the original feminists, espoused a workerist politics which demanded that militants be 'revolutionary'. One form of action—symbolic, military-style assaults on centres of power<sup>8</sup>—was reflected in feminist attacks on the Arc de Triomphe, the Petite Roquette prison at the time of Alain Geismar's trial, and the spectacular offensive organized against *Elle* magazine's *Etats Généraux*, all in the fall of 1970. These three events, which constitute an immense part of the identity-creating lore of the movement, reflected *gauchiste* notions about political action.

<sup>5</sup> The question of what deserves to be labelled MLF is a thorny one indeed. Here, I will use the label as a synonym for revolutionary feminism. This practice follows Picq, who defines the MLF as those feminists who accepted women-only (*seu-mieux*) groups as essential for feminist practice. The second criterion she uses is the commitment to revolutionary transformation, focusing more on societal changes than on legal and institutional reforms. Obviously, this definition is quite broad, although it does effectively differentiate the MLF from both egalitarian and syndicalist feminists. It is also much broader than what after 1979 was officially recognized by French patent law as the MLF.

<sup>6</sup> In the military-style Maoism of these years, sexist language and metaphor were widespread. Most commonly, willingness to participate courageously in Maoist assaults against the symbolic centres of power was celebrated as evidence that the young intellectuals, both female and male, had *des conilles au cul* (balls). In addition, Mao's famous phrase that *le pouvoir est au bout du fusil* was transformed, at an important meeting at the University of Vincennes in May 1970, into the assault phrase by the angry male leftists expelled from the meeting, *le pouvoir est au bout du phallus*! See Hervé Hamon et Patrick Rotman, *Génération 2. Les Années du pouvoir*, Paris, Seuil, p. 224 and *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account of the first meetings—the themes, noise, and difficulties—see Anne Tristan and Annie de Pisan, *Histoires du MLF*, Paris 1977. Excerpts appear in Toril Moi, ed., *French Feminist Thought. A Reader*, Oxford 1987, pp. 33–72.

<sup>8</sup> There were, of course, also efforts to do intellectual work, as the important publication of *Partisans* entitled *Libération des femmes: année zéro* as well as a mounting number of articles in the rest of the left-wing press testified.

At the same time, the legitimacy which the Maoists in particular accorded to inquiries into the personal life of militants meant that feminists' insistence on examining the way organizations functioned and leaders related to their comrades was well within acceptable discourse. Nevertheless, the conclusion that men might oppress their female comrades was not easy for male *gauchistes* to accept. It remained a much debated contradiction throughout the early years, especially as women associated with leading leftists emerged as important feminists.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond symbolic and spectacular actions, the major point of contact remained the General Assemblies. From the beginning, theoretical lines were drawn. After an initial lengthy dispute over whether 'feminism' could ever be revolutionary or was necessarily reformist and class collaborationist, three major positions solidified on how to understand women's oppression and how to do politics. In the first camp were the proponents of an essentialist theory, with a psychoanalytic definition of difference and a rationalization for separatist politics. The second included proponents of a theoretical consideration of class and sex-based oppression which would force a feminist analysis and politics into the theory and practice of Left politics. This position accepted alliances with other political formations for specific actions while replacing the essentialism of the first position with an analysis of socially constructed difference. The second camp was, however, sub-divided into a radical feminist position, which defined patriarchy as the primary social relation, and a class-based position which sought to incorporate feminism into class analysis.

### Psychoanalysis and Feminism

The partisans of Antoinette Fouque, combining psychoanalytic reasoning with a version of historical materialism derivative of Maoism, adopted the first position and quickly became a sect within the MLF. This analysis, which came to inform the group *Psychoanalyse et Politique*, rejected 'feminism' altogether, claiming it could only be reformist, assimilationist, and act within the terms of male power.<sup>10</sup> In their essentialist view of sexual difference, women's different voices derived from their sexuality.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Hamon and Rotman, *Génération*, pp. 226–29 provide a partial transcript of the tape of an early women-only meeting of Maoists in 1970. The group eventually decided to allow the men to hear the tape, to allay their fears about what 'their' women were saying. Again according to Hamon and Rotman, outside the first General Assemblies at Beaux Arts, several male leaders circulated in the corridors, trying to ensure that 'their' militants took a correct position (p. 236).

<sup>10</sup> Because Antoinette Fouque so forcefully rejected 'feminism' as reformism, her positions were attractive to many Maoist women in the General Assemblies. Eventually *Psych et Po* offered a fully elaborated and alternative definition of 'the' revolution. As Picq, *Le Mouvement*, pp. 65ff, admirably describes, however, the strict requirements of being part of the sect and differences over political strategy led within a few years to breakaways.

<sup>11</sup> For one testimony about the appeal of psychoanalysis, see Jacqueline Feldman, 'Que nous est-il donc arrivé?', *ANP*, # 20–21, 1989, pp. 40–42, 58ff.

*Psych et Po*, drawing on financial resources from a member's inheritance, solidified its position as one pole of revolutionary feminism and set up publications, a bookstore, and other money-making establishments. It was thus able to engage with the currently popular high-theoretical debates of French intellectual life around structuralist and post-structuralist theory. Moreover, having a fixed address (a material consequence of the financial resources) meant that in the eyes of the outside world, especially the Parisian press, psychoanalytic anti-feminism could appear to speak for 'the women's movement'. In this way its discourse was widely disseminated, attracting increasing numbers of adherents to the view that women, as women, were *en mouvement*.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, despite such media popularity and the continuing ability of its partisans to prevail in the General Assemblies through force of argumentation and charisma, this strand of revolutionary feminism had its critics. One set came from the circle of initiates itself. As early as 1972 the breakaway *groupe de jeudi* condemned the theoretical and practical focus of group activity and the overwhelming power exercised by insiders, especially Antoinette Fouque. Among its targets were *Psych et Po*'s refusal to engage in political practice, whether around abortion reform, elections or in neighbourhood groups. The *groupe de jeudi* sought to reconstruct the sense of unity among women which had characterized the earliest moments of the MLF, stressing the themes of sisterhood and political pluralism in the face of the sectarian mechanisms operating within *Psych et Po*.

The extent of the break with the rest of the MLF became absolutely clear in 1979 when *Psych et Po* claimed the initials MLF and the name *Mouvement de libération des femmes* as official and exclusive trademarks (*marques déposées*). That legal manoeuvre clearly indicated that *Psych et Po* wanted to speak for all women and to deny the contradictions which made unity in pluralism a major political necessity of the women's movement. From that point on the group became a pariah, referred to by feminists of all kinds as the MLF *déposé*, after *marque déposée*.<sup>13</sup>

### The Challenge to Vanguardism

As *Psych et Po* grew increasingly sectarian, the rest of the MLF became more pluralistic and other elements of revolutionary feminism acquired greater visibility. In the first General Assemblies alternative positions had been argued by the supporters of a revolutionary feminism which was more 'social' in its understanding of the oppression of women. Beginning from the insight of *The Second Sex* that women are

<sup>12</sup> The representation of women as *en mouvement*—in movement—was a multifaceted evocation of the notion of change, of the MLF itself, and of action. *Femmes en mouvement* was the title of the magazine published by *des femmes*, the publishing house linked to *Psych et Po*.

<sup>13</sup> For a description of the level of hostility among feminists, manifest at the 8 March 1980 demonstration, which contributed to popular perceptions even among feminists that the movement was suffering from fragmentation and decline see Francine Comte, 'MLF déposé', *Parti Pris*, #19, 1980, pp. 27–28.

made, not born, the partisans of this position set out—in widely divergent ways—to identify the societal mechanisms which constructed women as the 'other', the inferior of men, and to explore their articulation to other forms of oppression.<sup>14</sup> All this debate provided the energy for practical projects of feminist politics, ranging from consciousness-raising to publishing collectives and neighbourhood self-help groups.

By 1973–74 the contours of the French Left had changed, as the post-68 euphoria dissipated and organizations settled in for the long haul. At this moment a number of Trotskyist, Maoist and other leftist organizations decided to develop a closer relationship with feminism, charging some of their female militants with the task of carrying their line to the women's movement. Not surprisingly, these women also carried back the ideas and practices of feminism. This joint itinerary substantially strengthened the attention given to working women and class analysis within revolutionary feminism by giving greater visibility to its class-struggle wing.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, within the MLF, the women from left-wing organizations were regarded with suspicion as an outreaching arm of male politics, while within the extreme Left internal conflicts had broken out on the question by 1974, beginning with the Trotskyist *Ligne* and spreading rapidly to other groups.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the conflict and theoretical pluralism of this part of the MLF, these feminists did share a number of discursive elements. From the extreme Left they took the idea that 'everything is politics' and linked it to contemporary feminism's 'the personal is political'. In discussing their 'personal' lives, feminists changed the substance of political discourse, both among women and in the extreme Left movements with which they shared a discursive terrain if not always an organizational base. Assuming that 'personal' matters were burning political questions, feminists could pressure their erstwhile male comrades to pay attention to issues which had thus far been beyond the ken of Left politics. Reproductive policies, the silencing of women by male dominance in political speech, and the dependence of traditional styles of militancy on the servicing work of women became explosive issues which reverberated through the organizations, causing some to break up and others to reorganize themselves.

---

<sup>14</sup> Two detailed descriptions are Picq, *Le Mouvement*, and Claire Duchon, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand*, London 1986, pp. 40ff.

<sup>15</sup> A class-struggle wing of the MLF had existed from the beginning. It gained strength from its theoretical work which, drawing on Marxism, insisted upon the importance of uncovering the articulation of class and gender oppression, and from its practical engagement in neighbourhood groups and *groupes-femmes* in some workplaces. One of the earliest expressions of the class-struggle position was within the Cercle Elisabeth Dimitriev. From the early 1970s such groups preferred neighbourhood organization and more stable organizational forms rather than the General Assemblies. See Picq, *Le Mouvement*, pp. 35ff.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed and fascinating account see Marie-Claire Boons, et al., *C'est terrible, quand on y pense!*, Paris 1977. For a shorter, more 'analytic' version see Eliane Viennot, 'Des Stratégies et des femmes', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, 6–7, 1984; translated in Claire Duchon, ed. and trans., *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France*, Amherst, MA 1987.

But an even more fundamental criticism followed from the rejection of the Left's 'vanguardism'. Feminists' insistence that subjective knowledge, derived from people's exploration of their own lives in democratic and non-hierarchical settings, could compete with or even replace the 'texts' and *grands discours* of leaders cast grave doubts over the very basis of much leftist practice.<sup>7</sup> From the beginning feminists refused the traditional hierarchical and leader-centred forms of organization which the Left had accepted for decades, instead advocating and experimenting with collective forms of organization. According to feminists, vanguards should not 'take' politics to the people; popular struggles had to be generated by women themselves.<sup>8</sup> This commitment to expanding democracy, to breaking the boundaries between leaders and the base, and to 'listening' to ordinary women posed a direct challenge to long-standing leftist habits.

At the same time, feminists refused to privilege class exploitation as the source of all oppression and/or to accept that sexual oppression was a 'secondary contradiction'. They accused both working-class men and leftist male intellectuals of contributing to the oppression of women, and insisted that women-only groups were essential not simply to give women their voices in more solidaristic surroundings but because women as a group could constitute themselves only in the absence of their oppressors. No more than workers could invite bosses to participate in exploring the roots of their oppression, women could not invite men.

Because feminists recast revolutionary practice and insisted on naming men—either workers or those self-identified with workers—as an opponent, leftists denied the MLF working-class credentials. Intellectual vanguards had always claimed legitimacy because they were *au service du peuple* and because they could contribute to the organic unity of the working class. Once the behaviour of parts of the working class could be criticized and intellectuals no longer had privileged access to knowledge about revolutionary change, the very core of extreme Left thought came into question. In response some mixed leftist organizations condemned feminists for promoting petit-bourgeois politics and lacking a truly revolutionary understanding.<sup>9</sup> For many feminists, who had never been or were no longer militants in such mixed organizations, this accusation was taken as harsh but not totally misplaced. Indeed, the dispute over class credentials may have fostered efforts to challenge the men on their own terms, by developing a substitute 'grand theory' which put women's oppression at the centre and granted it at least an equivalent status to class exploitation.<sup>10</sup> But for other feminists, coming to the MLF from

<sup>7</sup> For a particularly good discussion see 'Léonéou', in Boons et al., *C'est terrible*, pp. 135-47.

<sup>8</sup> For the initial form of the criticisms see *C'est terrible*, p. 12. For the question of 'being revolutionary' see 'La vie privée est un scandale (politique)' (pp. 58ff.) and for the revolution 'Mettez du global dans votre moteur' (pp. 39ff.).

<sup>9</sup> On the loss of class credentials, see Picq, *Le Mouvement*, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Picq (pp. 36-37) is very good on this. This response, coming no doubt from the fact that all of these activists—both women and men—were intellectuals, accounts for the heavy investment and production in French circles of feminist theory of all kinds.



organizations to which they retained a political commitment, the battle over class credentials—and organizational issues which lay behind it—was more serious.

Revolutionary feminism was thus crucially marked throughout its existence by the fact that it came out of and remained tied to the extreme Left, whether because women continued to be active in mixed groups or because that part of the Left was the *interlocuteur valable* of the movement. As an heir of the post-'68 extreme Left, revolutionary feminism rejected ideas of statist change and embraced more spontaneous and less hierarchical forms of organization. In consequence it made few efforts to engage with the French state while also privileging the idea that societal transformation would come from mass actions against organized capitalism and its state and against those organizations which claimed to speak *for* and *in the name of* the oppressed.

By the 1980s the MLF was much weakened. The conflict with *Psyché à Po* had sapped some strength. More telling, however, was the general demobilization of the extreme Left brought about by economic crisis, the surge of the mainstream Left, and the transformation of many post-'68 male *gauchistes* into technocrats, bureaucrats, professors and/or male political leaders.<sup>21</sup> In these years some remnants of the MLF kept up various kinds of 'practical' activity, exemplified by the founding of women's centres in several cities and continued work on specific issues.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the MLF remained deeply divided over theoretical questions of 'difference' and 'social construction', so deeply as to make joint action difficult, although several groups have taken as a fundamental strategic position the effort to promote pluralism among feminists.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, deep debate also traverses the mixed organizations of the broad Left, even including the *Verts*, as each formation chooses which form of MLF feminism it will follow.

### Syndicalist Feminism

The greatest change which syndicalist feminism brought to French unionism was a representation of the *specificity* of working women's situation in capitalism, so that a new collective identity of 'working women' could be promoted. In particular, syndicalist feminism pushed unions to think of women as more than, or other than, mothers, and to acknowledge their sexuality and the impact that had in the workplace. Wider access to contraception and abortion became a union goal, necessary in order to give women control over their

---

<sup>21</sup> Hamon and Rotman's popular book on the extreme Left after 1968 has often been criticized for its relative inattention to women and feminism. This may, of course, be because of misogyny or because of the relatively early departure of feminists from the two *groupuscules* to which the authors pay most attention. More likely, it seems to me, is that there is simply less individual success to describe and celebrate for female *gauchistes* than for the men. Therefore, in a book intended to be a nostalgic retrospect on a 'maturation' process, the women's stories are simply less engrossing. See *Génération*.

<sup>22</sup> Françoise Collin, 'Ringuard ou ringuèle? La question des stratégies', *AMF*, #20-21, 1989, p. 163.

<sup>23</sup> On the *Cabiers du Griff* efforts to sustain pluralism, see Collin, p. 166. Other notable examples are *Collective Ruptures* and the Club Flora Tristan.

reproductive capacities. In addition, syndicalist feminism paid attention to the weight of ideas about women and about families which contributed to the experiences women confronted not only at work but in the broader society.

Once women were depicted as workers with 'specific' needs, there was a real shift in the representational range of the union. Where they promoted a universalistic assumption about the identity of the working class they now recognized the specificity not only of women but also of immigrant workers. With this shift in social maps came alterations in other aspects of the unions' political discourse—in particular, notions of how to do politics. These changes meant that the unions expanded the boundaries of their habitual practice to include matters which they had previously considered to fall within the realm of 'private life', beyond the reach of legitimate union politics. In particular, questions of control of reproduction and sexuality in the workplace, the division of labour in the family, and discrimination against women gained new attention.

This new representation dovetailed with the unions' efforts in the 1970s to make sense of a situation which was dramatically changing as unfamiliar kinds of workers—women and immigrants in the first instance—entered a workforce undergoing restructuring. Unions had to develop new political strategies in face of the economic crisis and the shifting conditions of the mainstream Left. Nevertheless, the discourse and mobilizational practices related to women's specificity of both the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) and the *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (CFDT) were greatly affected by ongoing strategic predilections.<sup>24</sup>

Even after it declined in influence, syndicalist feminism left a lasting legacy in union thinking about 'specificity'. However, as the union movement grew weaker in the 1980s and as parts of it abandoned the egalitarianism which had been an essential component of its goals in the 1970s, notions of 'specificity' or 'difference' could be turned against women. Instead of orienting strategy towards overthrowing or making more equitable the social relations which produced women's 'specific' needs, parts of the union movement came to accept gender differences as 'natural'. We shall return to this in the last section of this article.

After 1945 the CGT shared the egalitarian feminist positions of French Communism and other leftist formations. In those years the CGT represented an important counterforce to notions that women's place was in the home, that women's lives were exclusively defined by child-bearing, and that when women entered the labour force their salaries were—and should be—simply supplements to those of their husbands. The CGT celebrated instead the benefits of paid work for women, their families and the Left. This analysis was based on the contention that women and men workers were essentially the same, except that women bore children and therefore required additional

---

<sup>24</sup> Moreover, given the weight of politics for the French union movement, much of the strategic change responded to new conditions in the partisan arena.

protection to allow them to combine work and children. Well into the 1970s the CGT tended to represent all women as mothers, such that the distinguishing and identifying characteristic of being female was not simply the ability to *bear* children but the fact of *having* children.

The CGT foresaw that to grant full equality and recognition to women workers—including reasonable childbirth and childcare programmes—would challenge capital directly because capitalists and the state relied on natalist and familial ideologies to keep women in a labour market position where they could be super-exploited. Women's emancipation thus could follow only from the recognition and guarantee of women's right to work and from improved provisions for maternity leave, childcare and early retirement.<sup>25</sup> Collective bargaining and workplace mobilization was one arena to win such changes.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the CGT stressed the importance of political change, to be organized by the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF).

The CGT soon changed some of this thinking, however, under pressure from the growing CFDT. The institutional regeneration worked by deconfessionalization of Catholic unionism created space within the CFDT for a new discourse. Before 1970 the *Commissions Travailleuses* provided an organizational locale for insisting that particular demands (especially early retirement) were not sufficient to bring about an improvement in women's situation. Already by the late 1960s the CFDT was increasingly involved in a series of hyper-militant workplace actions around opposition to postwar labour processes and relations.<sup>27</sup> In these strikes, female semi-skilled workers (OS) participated in, or at least provided an important potential base for, CFDT expansion. It was in response to such experiences, as well as to pressure from the militants carrying new analyses of *autogestionnaire* democracy and women's liberation, that the CFDT's representation of women began to alter.

### The CFDT Takes the Lead

By 1970 the CFDT had unveiled a new strategy of *socialisme démocratique*

---

<sup>25</sup> The recognition of these needs and the particular interests of working women prompted the CGT to found a magazine for women, *Amisantes*, in 1955 and to hold a National Conference of Women Wage-Earners, beginning in 1948.

<sup>26</sup> In the 1973 Report of the National Conference of Women Wage-Earners the egalitarian feminism of the CGT still held sway. The report underlined the long-standing reluctance to take up matters traditionally considered 'private'. Better married life and division of responsibilities within the family would follow from women's increased participation in paid labour if accompanied by action against discrimination. No blame fell upon working-class men in this view, and so politics did not need to focus on changing the family or sexual relations. In this logic, abortion reform was a demand to meet the needs of 'working mothers'.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of these strikes as announcing the economic crisis, see Benjamin Coriat, 'Labour and Capital in the Crisis: France, 1966–82', in Mark Kesselman and Guy Groux, eds., *The French Workers' Movement*, London 1984. For their relationship to women's work see Jane Jenson, 'The Limits of "and the" Discourse: French Policies Towards Women', in Jane Jenson et al., eds. *The Feminization of the Labour Force: Paradoxes and Promise*, London 1988, pp. 157–60; and Danièle Kergoat, *Les Ouvrières*, Paris 1982, pp. 123ff.

at *autogestionnaire*, which included an analysis of the super-exploitation of women's labour, of centuries-old social relations of domination carried by many institutions but especially the family, and of ideology which contributed to the contemporary inferiority of women. In addition to poor working conditions, low salaries and vulnerability to unemployment, the heavy weight of old ideas kept women subordinate not only to capital but also to men, including working-class men and their organizations. For the CFTD, in consequence, struggles to liberate women had a role to play in the process of constructing socialism.<sup>28</sup>

Of course the new discourse did not banish old ideas and practices from the CFTD.<sup>29</sup> For example, the landmark 1970 Congress declared women's liberation a central goal but disbanded the *Commissions Travailleuses* and appointed but one woman, Jeannette Laot, to the leadership.<sup>30</sup> The Congress did show that many of the ideas of 1960s leftist politics, given such a boost by 1968, had migrated to the CFTD, including *autogestion* and an understanding that women's location in capitalism was not the same as men's. It meant also that feminism would be subsequently associated in the minds of more conservative CFTDers with the influence of *gauchisme*, which they saw as having infiltrated the whole confederation.<sup>31</sup>

The CGT also evolved, particularly in sectors where women unionists had the greatest presence. The magazine *Antoinette* promoted new representations of women's commissions in workplaces across France.<sup>32</sup> For the CGT by the middle of the 1970s syndicalist feminism had become a visible component of union action. The 1977 Conference of Women Wage-Earners provides the best snapshot of the collective identity promoted by syndicalist feminists.<sup>33</sup> In its discussion, the Conference moved away from constant consideration of

<sup>28</sup> It is useful to note that the 1970 Congress, which laid out the basic position of the CFTD for the coming decades, took place *before* the first public manifestation of the MLF at the Arc de Triomphe.

<sup>29</sup> Laot remains the best internal source on the CFTD. She documents the weight of old discourse and gives an example with regard to the right to work. Jeannette Laot, *Stratégie pour les femmes*, Paris 1981, pp. 87–88. For the best study overall of unions and feminism see Margaret Maruani, *Les Syndicats à l'épreuve du féminisme*, Paris 1979.

<sup>30</sup> The Commissions were disbanded under pressure from feminists within the CFTD who argued that groups 'for' women simply continued long-standing representations of their 'special interests'.

<sup>31</sup> This antipathy to the extreme Left also accounts for Laot's departure from MLAC after the 1974 vote of the *les Veil*. See Laot, *Stratégie pour les femmes*, p. 91 and Boons et al., *C'est terrible*, pp. 102–03.

<sup>32</sup> Given the CGT's isolation from the extreme Left and the *autogestionnaire* milieu, its own syndicalist feminism developed out of rethinking Marxist categories to incorporate new notions of women's liberation as well as from the influence of international feminism. Traces of ideas like Betty Friedan's 'problem without a name'—which pointed to the social specificity of women's situation—were somewhat easier to incorporate than those of French revolutionary feminism shaped by extreme Left opposition to traditional working-class organizations and their world-views.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of this conference as well as the one held in 1973, see Jane Jenson, 'The "Problem" of Women', in Kesselman and Groux, ed., *The French Workers' Movement*, p. 166.

*travailleuses* (working women) to a more general category of *femmes*. This enabled the CGT to analyse the domination of women, as a group, by men and to trace this domination not only in society and the workplace, but into the heart of the organized working class itself—the CGT. In this way, the struggle against the super-exploitation of women—which was the long-standing legacy of the CGT's egalitarian feminism—became linked to an analysis of women's *specific* situation, the superimposition of economic exploitation and sexual subordination by capital and by men as a group. This analysis finally made the CGT a carrier of syndicalist feminism.

The primary generator of syndicalist feminism's collective identity continued to be the CFDT, however. It remained strongly influenced by democratic themes sustaining its vision of a socialist model of development carried by parts of the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) and *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (PSU). Within these understandings, the union had a double responsibility. It obviously had to work to eliminate the conditions which prohibited women from achieving equality as workers. But in addition it had to participate in struggles for state reform and changes in social relations to destroy the sexism and sexual division of labour. This meant, in concrete terms, a politics of struggles beyond the workplace for better childcare, training and education and access to contraception and abortion, as well as a new attention to sexuality.

In contrast to the CGT, which looked to the PCF for political representation, the CFDT asserted its autonomous responsibility for direct participation in political change. It was thus willing to accept Jeannette Laot's founding role and leadership in the *Mouvement pour la libéralisation de l'avortement et de la contraception* (MLAC), and to encourage local unions and federations to become important sources of material and ideological support for MLAC and Planned Parenthood in France, the *Mouvement français pour le planning familial* (MFPF).<sup>34</sup> This strategic difference with the CGT followed from the CFDT's analysis that the liberation of women was essential to create democratic and *autogestionnaire* socialism. Like 'real change' in general, real change in the situation of women could not await a decisive moment of rupture or top-down actions by union leaders or political parties. The CFDT's task was to begin immediately to create movement, and the inclusion of workplace and society-wide struggle for women's liberation was a necessary ingredient of such a beginning. The CFDT was willing to act with groups of egalitarian feminists to win reforms from the state as well. In all this, therefore, CFDT feminists became a linchpin for all wings of feminism in the 1970s.

### After the Union of the Left

Neither of the syndicalist feminist positions was solid, however. In response to the breakdown of the Union of the Left, by the late 1970s the two confederations were moving away from their own agreement

<sup>34</sup> On the CFDT's importance for the MFPF, see both Laot, *La Stratégie pour les femmes* and MFPF, *D'une Révolte à une lutte: 25 ans d'histoire du planning familial*, Paris, Tierce, Chapter 10.

of 1974 that had brought joint programmes, including one for women, away too, along quite different routes, from syndicalist feminism as such.<sup>35</sup> In the CGT syndicalist feminists found themselves caught up in internal union struggles about the future. Feminists, in alliance with other opponents of traditional approaches, had become an important force for the development of ideas about a more democratic, decentralized unionism. Ultimately such combat over CGT strategy, politics and internal life came to threaten the major institutional locale of new thinking about women—the offices of *Antoinette*.<sup>36</sup> By 1981–82 mainstream CGT officials were denouncing CGT syndicalist feminism as reformist, insufficiently focused on the class struggle, and pro-CFDT; one of the major institutional spaces for new approaches to women had been ‘taken in hand’.

The CGT subsequently returned to its egalitarian feminist positions, in particular opposing efforts by companies to restructure the workforce by assigning women and other ‘marginal’ categories of the labour force to part-time, temporary—more ‘flexible’ forms of work. It continued to insist on women’s right to work and their economic independence. But by its 1985 Conference the openness of 1977 had all but vanished:<sup>37</sup> while the theme of women’s specificity never disappeared completely, in time it became much muted and more economistic.

The CFDT also began to take stock after the 1978 elections as it developed its strategy of ‘recentering’ (*recentrage*), an *autocritique* of the confederation’s earlier strategy. Supporters of recentering claimed that the CFDT had been ‘too political’ and they advocated a return to a more traditional focus on collective bargaining. In time much of the CFDT’s discourse stressing broad-based, society-wide struggles against ideological forms disappeared along with demands for political reforms. By abandoning the goal of a shorter workweek and accepting the economic crisis as unfortunate but inevitable, the CFDT lost not only the left-wing militants who had been carriers of syndicalist feminist analyses but also the positions which since the 1960s had made it a promoter of women’s right to work full-time in order to achieve economic independence. In contrast to the CGT, the CFDT did not return to an egalitarian feminist position; rather, it simply left women to carry the burdens of restructuring as best they individually could.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> On the CFDT’s importance for the MFFP, see both Laot, *La Stratégie pour les femmes* and MFFP, *D’une Révolte à une lettre: 25 ans d’histoire du planning familial*, Paris, Tierce, Chapter 10.

<sup>36</sup> For example, several *Unions Départementales* accused *Antoinette* and its editors of not working hard enough in the 1981 election to combat ‘the anti-Communist campaign’ supposedly rampant in the country. This meant, in essence, failing to follow the new isolationist politics of the PCF.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of this conference see Chantal Rogerat, ‘Pratiques féministes et pratiques syndicales’, *Cahiers du Féminisme*, # 41–42, 1987, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> For an important consideration of the complex question of part-time work and union positions on it, see Danièle Kergoat, *Les Femmes et le travail à temps partiel*, Paris, Ministère du Travail, 1984, Appendix 1.

Despite the decline in organizational support for syndicalist feminism, a discursive change had been worked in the union movement. Women had emerged from the general category of 'worker' and taken on specific characteristics, related not simply to maternity but to their location within the labour force as a category exploited by capital and oppressed by men. Issues of reproductive control, sexual harassment, training and participation stayed on the unions' agenda. Nevertheless, the legacy of this shift in the representation of working women would, ironically, turn against women in the 1980s as the Socialist government, supported by the recentred CFDT, moved to facilitate capital's restructuring of the labour force in a quite inegalitarian direction.

### Egalitarian Feminism

Well before 1968 organizations actively promoting equality for women workers, citizens and mothers existed, and by the 1970s new groups were springing up. Ranging from *Cboisir* to associations of women lawyers, from the *Ligue du Droit des Femmes* to the women's 'current' within the PS, such groups were, on the one hand, often vilified by revolutionary feminists for their 'reformism' and insensitivity to the dangers of cooptation and, on the other hand, criticized by syndicalist feminists for their failure to pay sufficient attention to ordinary working women suffering from low pay, discrimination and sexual harassment.

Nevertheless, women politicians, academics and activists—often within parties of the Left—continued to agitate for reform.<sup>39</sup> The Left's perspectives on the causes of women's inequality drew on Marxism and other class-based theories, giving egalitarian feminism the potential for alliance with the other two strands of the women's movement. But right-wing parties also took up some of the demands for legislative reform, especially those affecting rights within the family. The media were important as well, as throughout the 1960s the 'feminine press' expanded, and its constituency incorporated more working (especially professional) women concerned about civil rights, equal access to the labour force, family power and reproduction. This version of egalitarian feminism was quite comparable to the 'bourgeois feminism' familiar in Anglo-Saxon countries, in which legislative change and good-will provided the primary reform perspective.

It is impossible to give a complete overview of all such feminist

---

<sup>39</sup> Political parties on the Left were an important location for this kind of action. The Socialists after 1945 and the PCF from the 1930s had advocated an equalization of the legal status of women and men, although the addition of reproductive rights to this agenda came much later. An important change occurred in 1965 when François Mitterrand declared himself in favour of a reform of the law restricting access to contraception. For the history of the Left parties and reproductive rights, see Jane Jensen, 'Changing Discourse, Changing Agenda: Political Rights and Reproductive Rights in France', in Mary Katzenstein and Carol Mueller, *The Women's Movements of the US and Western Europe: Consciousness, Political Opportunity and Public Policy*, Philadelphia 1987.

organizations, since their very strategy of focusing on specific reforms caused them to multiply in step with the number of issues.<sup>40</sup> Demanding women's equality via reforms, egalitarian feminists did not represent women as a collectivity nor did they see reform as requiring action by women as a group. For them it was obvious that inequalities had to be overcome through the actions of right-thinking women and men, primarily in mixed organizations. The discourse of egalitarian feminists presented women as disaggregated into specific functions, as mothers, citizens, workers.<sup>41</sup> These did not produce a single gender category, because *the* universal identity category—whether the family, the nation or the class—was one in which sexual difference was never privileged.

The unwillingness of such groups to identify 'women' as a fundamental social category caused most difficulty when revolutionary feminism arrived on the scene in the 1970s. Within the MLF, despite theoretical differences dividing the various tendencies, there was agreement that women should be represented as a coherent social category because they shared a common experience in the face of male power. For egalitarian feminists, in contrast, women-only groups might be useful at times for quite practical purposes, as places where women would feel more comfortable speaking, where they could occupy themselves with 'women's issues' and where they could learn to be full citizens or revolutionaries. Women's commissions had, indeed, always been important for Left parties and unions, as they had been for religious groups. But this was not a *non-mixité* of principle; it was one of convenience. The question of whether groups should be mixed resurfaced throughout the 1970s, for practical political actions like those around the *loi Veil* which reformed the abortion law.<sup>42</sup>

Egalitarian feminists never accepted, then, the first principle of the MLF and they continued to be *militantes* within their larger political formations.<sup>43</sup> But the major area of disagreement with the MLF was over the question of seeking legal reforms. The only reform which most—but not all—revolutionary feminists were willing to pursue wholeheartedly was that of the abortion law. All other areas of action were controversial and divisive. This meant that the terrain of action was left to egalitarian feminist groups, sometimes in

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the longevity of some of the original groups see Dominique Lousseau, 'Le Féminisme, éternel phénix?', *NRF* # 20–21, 1989.

<sup>41</sup> For a description of this process, see Martine Mueller et al, *Etre féministe en France: contribution à l'étude des mouvements de femmes, 1944–67*, ATP Recherches sur les Femmes et Recherches féministes, Paris 1987.

<sup>42</sup> Some feminist groups, most obviously *Psych et Ps*, refused to participate in actions directed by MLAC because it was a mixed group. Similarly, in the 1979 mobilizations to finalize the 1974 abortion law, two demonstrations were organized, one mixed, in which the trade unions and the Socialist Party were particularly active, and one for women only. By the time of the mobilizations in 1982 to force the Left government to include abortions under the Social Security system, a single mixed demonstration was all that could be mustered.

<sup>43</sup> Nor did they, unlike syndicalist feminists, create a specific category deriving from women's experience with capitalism and male power.



with subsets of the MLF but more often alone or with syndicalist feminists.

### New Alignments

The experience of the PCF illustrates the challenge faced by such organizations. In the early 1960s the PCF, like the CGT, took resolutely egalitarian feminist positions. At that time the leadership decided that it had paid insufficient attention to the changing situation of women, in particular to rising rates of female labour force participation, so it dusted off its old discourse in which *la condition féminine* was a fundamental concept. Through participation in paid work, women could establish the personal independence and political consciousness necessary to participate fully in the struggle for socialism. Only socialism, however, could bring complete liberation. At the same time, the PCF had a class analysis of women's place in advanced capitalism which defined women as doubly exploited in their dual roles in production and reproduction. Moreover, since capitalists refused to accept the social character of maternity, women and men were forced to absorb the costs and work of childbearing and childcare themselves. This discourse recognized the importance of domestic labour to capitalism, that women worked a double day, and that institutional, legal and ideological mechanisms reproduced the subordinate status of women.<sup>44</sup> The PCF also began in the 1970s to pay more attention to the gender division of labour within the party and, for a short time, recognized the advantages of an autonomous women's movement.

When Left Unity collapsed in the late 1970s, the experience of feminists within the PCF was nonetheless similar to that within the CGT. Because of their emphasis on democratization of the party, feminists came to be associated with the Eurocommunist forces which lost out in the internal battles after 1977. Those who lost, left, and each wave of departures took with it a cohort of feminists. In 1979, for example, the collective *Elles Voient Rouge* left the PCF and joined forces with the MLF.<sup>45</sup>

Egalitarian feminism as a whole suddenly gained new resources, however, after 1981. The newly elected Socialist President recognized

---

<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed examination of this theory and the 1970s experience with the MLF, see Jane Jenson, 'The French Communist Party and Feminism', *The Socialist Register* 1980, London 1980.

<sup>45</sup> For a description of the internal workings of the PCF, which provoked departures like those of *Elles Voient Rouge* as well as less dramatic but equally intense debate, see Jane Jenson and George Ross, *The View from Inside: A French Communist Call in Crisis*, Berkeley 1984, esp. chs 5, 8, 19, 22.

<sup>46</sup> For a history of women's trajectory of change—from being the mainstay of the Right when they first received the suffrage in 1945 to being a pillar of the Left constituency—see Janine Mossuz-Lavau and Mariette Sineau, *Enquêtes sur les femmes et la politique en France*, Paris 1983, part 1. This analysis clearly demonstrates that women's participation in the paid labour force is the best predictor of a Left vote. Therefore, as rates of women's paid work increased, so too did their support for the Left. By 1981, the long-standing gender gap had disappeared.

that much of his success might be attributed to the rising rates of female support: in 1981, for the first time ever, a majority of French women voted for the Left.<sup>46</sup> Mitterrand immediately called upon Yvette Roudy to form the Ministry of the Rights of Women. A supporter of Mitterrand more than the women's current within the PS, the Minister had been an advocate of expanded rights for women since the 1960s and had pressed within the Socialist Party for greater attention to 'women's issues' and promotion of women within the party apparatus. Roudy continued to focus on such initiatives between 1981 and 1986, developing programmes for labour-force equality, attacks on sexism in advertising and the media, campaigns to push for the use of contraception, and efforts to make French society generally more sensitive to women's needs. The Ministry attracted MLF and syndicalist feminists to work within the state, which meant that Roudy's egalitarian feminism was modified somewhat. However, as the next section demonstrates, the balance of political forces was such, especially after 1983, that it became increasingly difficult for the Ministry of the Rights of Women to prevail in the face of the PS's retreat from traditional values of egalitarianism.<sup>47</sup>

### Some Consequences of the Varieties of French Feminism

Women's movements in most countries have been divided into several wings, which have had greater or lesser success in working together to achieve basic feminist goals. All of these experiences differ according to the representational conditions in which movements find themselves and to which they contribute, as well as depending on the balance of forces each movement faces. The French women's movement has been one in which divisions have been sustained over time, via a politics which owes much to the predilections of its leftist allies, and whose internal conflicts, tracking those of the whole Left, have always made joint statements problematic. One manifestation of these divisions is that the three wings of the movement never agreed about the discursive constitution of 'women' nor, then, about the basis of a collective identity for an actor labelled 'women'.

The universe of political discourse has contained several identities competing with one another for the power to represent women and their interests. While revolutionary feminism and syndicalist feminism could agree that there was a collective identity rightly labelled 'women', whose constitution derived from sexual difference and not solely from family status, egalitarian feminism provided another representation. This third wing of French feminism eschewed a single category and preferred to use female forms of categorial nouns (*travailleuse*, *citoyenne*) or to define women by a social role—for example, as mothers. Following from these differences in collective identity were variations in the depictions of women's interests used by the three wings, ranging from revolutionary cultural transformation to the amelioration of women's legal status.

---

<sup>47</sup> On this move see George Ross and Jane Jenson, 'The Tragedy of the French Left', *New Left Review* 171, September–October 1988.

In representing their history, French feminists point to only a single victory—the changed law on abortion—and it would indeed be hard to sustain claims to further effects. But discursive variety alone cannot account for the relative weakness of the French women's movement. The organizational legacy of a predominant wing which eschewed reformism and allied with a declining political force and two other wings caught up in the internal convolutions of their larger organizations must weigh heavily in any account. The rest of this article traces the impact of the particular politics of feminism in France by examining the experience first of abortion reform and then activity around women's right to work. These two realms—women's control over their own bodies and access to economic independence—were and remain fundamental arenas of action for contemporary women's movements everywhere.

Throughout the 1970s the French women's movement campaigned through mass demonstrations, public law-breaking, institution-building and legislative lobbying to repeal the 1920 law banning contraception and abortion. The *loi Veil* of 1974 embodied a compromise, in which *l'interruption volontaire de la grossesse* (IVG) was legalized under certain conditions, and for an initial period of five years—a limitation which meant that further mobilization took place throughout the 1970s. Moreover, the law designated IVG an exceptional medical procedure, not reimbursed by Social Security. These serious restrictions resulted from legislative jockeying between the natalist and Catholic portions of the Right, which opposed any liberalization, and progressive legislators who sought abortion on demand paid for by the state.

In constructing this compromise a central role fell to the MFPF (the French branch of the international family planning movement) which the state and political parties credentialed as the legitimate voice for reform of the 1920 Law. The MFPF, which spanned all three wings of the women's movement, brought the movement's demands to various state investigatory bodies and was an important source of information and a rallying point for the coalition of reform supporters, including feminist groups, the PCF, PS, parts of the Gaullist movement, supporters of President Giscard d'Estaing, and the trade unions, as well as associations of leftist doctors. The MFPF, which had become increasingly feminist in its understanding of reproduction in the half-decade between the 1967 contraception reform and the *loi Veil*, acted as an intermediary between the women's movement and the reform process. The existence of a feminist organization able and willing to perform this task meant that debates about abortion increasingly reflected women's need for reproductive control. This change could occur only because of the role played by revolutionary feminism, within and alongside the MFPF. At the same time, however, if it had not been for the syndicalist and egalitarian feminists willing to engage with the state and knowledgeable about the political process, it is unlikely that the *loi Veil* would have been passed. Again, the MFPF and later MLAC became the locale for such cooperation.

## Struggles over Contraception and Abortion

The MFPF did not come easily to such leadership.<sup>48</sup> The organization grew up in the 1950s out of a movement of doctors and couples who wished to see family planning services freely available. Since all forms of birth control were then illegal in France, this meant conducting a campaign for legalization at the same time as running clinics at the edge of the law. Popular enthusiasm for better access to birth control and committed engagement by a generation of doctors—several of great prominence—created a mass organization.<sup>49</sup> Egalitarian feminists were active in the movement.<sup>50</sup>

After a successful campaign, limited access to contraception was achieved in 1967 and extended in 1974, but the reform was not discussed as, nor did it represent, any recognition of women's individual sexuality and their need to control reproduction. Proponents of reform were careful to insist that the law would result in better babies, stronger families, and therefore a stronger France.<sup>51</sup> Thus the new law was squarely planted in ideas about the family, with additional themes coming from the longstanding concern for the nation's birthrate.

The MFPF had always avoided the divisive question of abortion, but by the late 1960s could do so no longer. A long struggle to radicalize its position shook the MFPF through the first years of the 1970s, as it became an important actor in the campaign to change the law. Initial proposals before the National Assembly would have limited access to so-called 'social cases' or made doctors arbiters of a woman's decision. In its dossiers and testimony the MFPF criticized such proposals, instead describing women as responsible, fully capable of making a decision about abortion and meriting the right to do so.<sup>52</sup> However, this shift in the public face of the MFPF, plus the reluctance of its most famous medical personnel to promote abortion reform, reduced the organization's legitimacy. At a crucial point, for example, the MFPF was excluded from a Ministerial Council discussing the matter and the organization was forced to rely on allies to speak for it, including union representatives. Thus the MFPF acted as intermediary

---

<sup>48</sup> All the analysis of the MFPF in the next paragraphs, unless otherwise indicated, is from MFPF, *D'une Révolte à une lutte*, Chapters 9–10.

<sup>49</sup> In the late 1960s three Nobel prize-winners graced the Board of Directors of the MFPF.

<sup>50</sup> For a good discussion of pre-1968 feminism and the MFPF see Mueller et al., *Elles féministes*, pp. 25–27 and MFPF, *D'une Révolte à une lutte*, Chapters 6–8.

<sup>51</sup> For consideration of these campaigns see Jensen, 'Changing Discourse, Changing Agenda', pp. 78–80.

<sup>52</sup> The 'social case' was a favourite argument for the PCF. Usually the Communists would evoke a mother of three, pregnant but unable to support another mouth, because her wages and/or her husband's were too low, housing was inadequate, and collective services were insufficient. It is testimony to the early penetration of the new discourse of the women's movement into the PCF that its representatives substantially reduced their reliance on the 'social case' argument and began to argue for women's right to control their reproduction.

between the women's movement and the state, by maintaining quite concrete alliances with other progressive forces like unions.<sup>33</sup>

The MFPF was not the only organization of this type. In fact after 1973 it acted as part of a federation of groups, the *Mouvement pour la Libération de l'avortement et contraception* (MLAC). In 1970 a member of a founding group of the MLF was approached by a journalist from *Le Nouvel Observateur* with a proposal that the magazine publish a statement by several prominent women that they had had illegal abortions.<sup>34</sup> She raised the idea in one of the General Assemblies, but opposition to any dealings with the mainstream press and/or reliance on 'stars' to present women's legitimate demands meant that the proposal generated little enthusiasm.<sup>35</sup> The organizational impossibility of writing a manifesto and generating a petition campaign out of such a large and amorphous body encouraged the few women who were interested to do it themselves. This they did, producing the *Manifeste de 343* in April 1971.

Another act in the campaign involved the much-publicized trial of a teenage girl who had had an abortion and her mother who had helped her. Gisèle Halimi, the organizer of *Choisir*, used her advocacy at the *procès de Bobigny* to underline the fact that numerous women were not only having abortions but going unpunished. Indeed, the rank inequity of not charging Simone de Beauvoir and the other 342, while trying a poor adolescent and her mother, provided all the evidence that anyone needed of the injustice in the current law. The MLF and many other groups demonstrated during the trial, while Halimi called numerous witnesses from among feminists, doctors, political parties and the MFPF.<sup>36</sup>

### The Emergence of MLAC

MLAC came into being in April 1973 out of the effort to produce the *Manifeste de 343* and a similar petition by doctors (331 of whom in February 1973 admitted to having performed abortions), as well the mobilization for Bobigny. The small group of original organizers

---

<sup>33</sup> This alliance was cemented over and over, at the top (by exchanging dossiers for Ministerial Consultations) and at the base. The latter is exemplified by the controversy around *Histoires d'A.*, the highly controversial film in which an abortion by the vacuum method (Karman) occurred on camera. Prevented by the Grenoble police from showing the film, militants moved from site to site in the city, finally settling on the *Bourse du Travail*. That choice reflected their judgement that the CRS would not dare enter such a union locale. See MFPF, *D'une Révolte à une lutte*, pp. 222-23. Part of the reason why the alliance formed easily was that a crucial pillar of support for the change in MFPF positions towards those of the women's movement came from the post-68 generation of doctors, organized in the *Groupe information santé* (GIS), which supported MFPF and other initiatives through these years. These doctors rejected any professional identity which would give them the right to decide questions of reproduction for women.

<sup>34</sup> For details, see Tristan and de Pisan, *Histoires du MLF*, pp. 57-80.

<sup>35</sup> For *Nouvel Obs* the interest obviously lay in the publicity effect of well-known names. Eventually the organizers reached a compromise, having a mix of famous and unknown names in the *Manifeste de 343*.

<sup>36</sup> See Gisèle Halimi, *La Cause des femmes*, Paris 1973, Chapter 3.

expanded to include members of many other groups, including Jeanette Laot from the CFDT and delegates from most of the Left parties.<sup>57</sup> MLAC undertook mass activities, and set up neighbourhood centres to provide contraception and abortion counselling as well as meeting places for women. It also organized trips outside France for women seeking abortions, and in general publicized both the need for greater access to abortion in France and the willingness of a large number of women—publicly known or not—to break the law.

The strategy involved three fronts. First there were spectacular publicity events, including *manifestes* or street demonstrations. Second came continuing actions to provide abortion and thus publicly flout the law. The consequent breakdown in legality, accompanied by massive publicity, forced the state to act, but repression, as Bobigny and other trials demonstrated, simply provoked more disobedience and publicity. Reform therefore became a more compelling course. The third front was lobbying for a law which would maximize women's liberty to choose an abortion, with the costs covered by the Social Security system. Here MLAC, with its dense network of contacts in other organizations and reaching from egalitarian and syndicalist feminists to the MLF, became a crucial intermediary.

The *loi Veil* was a compromise, of course. The forces of opposition—among the parties of the Right, conservative doctors and in the Church—were politically powerful. Therefore, throughout the 1970s mobilization was needed to encourage IVG centres, and in 1979 the same forces had to mobilize to protect the *loi Veil* when it came up for renewal. In 1982, moreover, when the Left government threatened to backtrack on its promise of including IVG in the Social Security system, feminists and leftists took to the streets again. Building on previous theoretical debates, MLAC and several of its component parts helped to incorporate into a legislative compromise the collective identity of 'women' as individuals, sexually different from men but not defined by family status, and with the right to reproductive control. It forced parties and the state to take seriously this new representation of women.

### Changing Patterns of Labour Force Participation

The influence of the women's movement at an economic level is harder to discern, in large part because it was very late in coming to recognize the need to intervene in this realm.<sup>58</sup> The economic situation of French women altered, of course, a great deal over the

<sup>57</sup> The CFDT was not willing to delegate Laot officially, although it accepted her participation *à titre personnel*. *Choisir* was an observer as was the PCF. The PCF did not delegate anyone because the Trotskyist LCR was officially part of MLAC. For the list of participants and the founding document, see MFFP, *D'une Révolte à une lutte*, pp. 201, 420.

<sup>58</sup> The first important documents on 'work' produced within the MLF date from the early 1980s. In 1982 there was an Estates General entitled 'Les Femmes dans le Travail et le Travail des Femmes' in Paris. Participation was widely drawn from within the women's movement and the unions, but the preparation of this effort was also marred by internal conflict among various wings over orientation.

two decades when the women's movement was most active. Nevertheless, the impetus for such change and the directions for the future have depended more on the decisions of business, the state and the male-dominated portions of the labour movement; the balance of forces has been much less responsive to the preferences of the women's movement.

Three factors have made important contributions to the patterns of labour force participation of French women: changing social norms; the strategies of capital for restructuring; and the labour-market and family policies of the state. In the latter, the influence of the women's movement—given the reluctance of revolutionary feminism to engage with the state and the relative decline of syndicalist feminism which left egalitarian feminism to carry the ball—has been minimal.

Since the 1960s the female percentage of the labour force has been rising steadily. In 1969 it was 35.3 per cent, in 1979 38.8 per cent, and in 1988 43.5 per cent. By 1988 45.6 per cent of all women over 15 were employed (while 64.6 per cent of men were). It is even more striking to examine the experience of particular subgroups. In 1988 almost three-quarters of all women of prime childbearing age (25–39) worked outside the home, while young women and men (15–24) had the same rates of labour-force participation.<sup>59</sup> The change has been even more dramatic in the case of women with children. To illustrate, in all two-parent families with at least one child, 33 per cent of women were in the labour force in 1968, 43 per cent in 1975, 54 per cent in 1982 and 63 per cent in 1987.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, such trends have not destroyed the wage gap. Among those with full-time jobs, men's incomes are 25 per cent higher than women's, the gap being greatest among senior managers and professionals and approximately equal across the other occupations. Moreover, while there is a career ladder for men, up which they may progress with age and seniority, women are more likely to remain poorly paid throughout their working lives.<sup>61</sup>

A further aspect is the presence of gender-related differences in education and training. While women are over-represented in the higher levels of the school system, they have less access to the most prestigious institutions. Pressure from feminism did lead finally in the 1970s to the admission of women to *École Polytechnique*, the *Cours de Comptes* and the *Inspecteurs des Finances*, which are the routes of recruitment to the high civil service and to management in the private sector. In addition, the formally co-educational *École Nationale d'Administration* (ENA), whose students were 90 per cent male in the 1970s, 'achieved' a ratio of three men for every one woman by the mid-

<sup>59</sup> Calculated from *Données Sociales* 1987, Paris INSEE, 1987, p. 127 and *Enquête sur l'emploi de 1988: Résultats détaillés*, Paris, INSEE, 1988, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> The reported statistics include both married women and women living conjugally with a man. The French state recognizes the latter both legally and statistically as a 'family' situation.

<sup>61</sup> *Données Sociales*, pp. 159–61.

1980s.<sup>62</sup> Despite this shift, however, women tended to gain less from their education. Whereas a man with a degree from one of France's *grandes écoles* (the most prestigious institutions) will earn 3.5 times more than a man with no recognized training credentials, the differences for women is only 2.7. Women with a university degree are less likely than men with such credentials to enter management positions (58 per cent as compared with 83 per cent).<sup>63</sup> And despite holding fifty per cent of civil service positions, women have very little presence in the highest levels of state administration.<sup>64</sup>

Behind these general characteristics of the activities of age, family and educational groups lies a very important alteration in the gender composition of the French economy in the years of crisis. The *only* category of the labour force which has increased in absolute size—largely through new jobs in the tertiary sector—is that of women between the ages of 25 and 54. But women's employment also increased, much less dramatically, in industry, rising from 19 per cent of the industrial workforce in 1969 to 21 per cent in 1988. While this rise is not steep, it does indicate that women continued to retain their jobs in industry and to be an important source particularly of non-skilled workers. In 1988, 14 per cent of all women in the labour force were industrial workers.

These patterns mean several things. First, they reflect a number of important adjustments in the ways in which French women have been organizing their lives, both at work and in the family. Secondly, they indicate the effects of restructuring towards service-sector employment and the desire of employers in both the secondary and the tertiary sectors to have more part-time workers, both of which have favoured the creation of jobs for women.<sup>65</sup>

### Restructuring Strategies and Women

One crucial factor lying behind the willingness of women not only to seek employment but also to remain in it throughout their lifetime is the decline in the average number of children, since it has been observed that most women leave the labour force only after the birth of a third child. There are, however, differences between particular categories. Women working in a traditional family enterprise—for example, as artisans or in shops—or in agriculture are much less likely to leave the labour force, as are women with training or professional credentials. The women most likely to depart are unskilled industrial workers or service-sector employees, no matter the number of children.<sup>66</sup> They continue to provide a pool of employees whose attachment to the labour force is less strong than men's and

<sup>62</sup> Joni Lovenduski, *Women and European Politics: Contemporary Feminism and Public Policy*, Amherst 1986, p. 222.

<sup>63</sup> *Données Sociales*, pp. 555, 160–67.

<sup>64</sup> The exception is the judiciary, though there women are overwhelmingly magistrates, with a great drop-off at the upper levels. Lovenduski, *Women and European Politics*, pp. 223–24.

<sup>65</sup> See Maryse Huet, 'Déchiffrer le droit à l'emploi', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, # 14–15, 1986, pp. 15–17. In 1989, for the first time in years, the number of jobs taken by men equalled those taken by women. *Le Monde*, 14 July 1989.

<sup>66</sup> *Données Sociales*, pp. 498–99.



whose career patterns are discontinuous. Employers in France have been able to base their restructuring strategies on the availability of such a labour pool.

A second major change contributing to female labour-force participation is the increase in single-parent families, which reached 12.5 per cent of all families with children in 1987. And, of course, the vast majority of these were female-headed. While most have been created as the result of divorce or death of a spouse, a growing number result from the declining tendency of the French to marry.<sup>67</sup> With the exception of widows, women who head single-parent families are more likely to be in the full-time paid labour force than is the female population as a whole.

There are two major problems with the ways in which women's participation in both the industrial and service sectors increased as a consequence of restructuring strategies. The first was that many of these new jobs were either part-time or temporary. The second was that women suffered disproportionately from unemployment. Between 1982 and 1986, 130,000 women lost a full-time job, while at the same time 450,000 part-time positions were created.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, 70 per cent of the new jobs filled by women were part-time ones, while women were also over-represented among workers with temporary jobs or limited contracts. The result was that by the mid-1980s 26 per cent of white-collar workers (*employés*) and 18 per cent of blue-collar workers (*ouvrières*) had part-time contracts. Manufacturers, encouraged by the government, often transformed full-time jobs into part-time ones, rather than lay off workers.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, following an initial effort after 1981 to discourage the growth of temporary, short-term employment, the government by 1986 accepted that it was a major element of companies' strategies to restructure the labour force in ways which gave them greater discretion in organizing production processes as well as permitting the de-regulation of working conditions.<sup>70</sup> It did not follow from any 'demand' on the part of the workers, either women or men. Many had part-time or temporary jobs or flextime imposed on them and in response they continued to seek full-time and stable work.

In this process, employers' creation of part-time jobs has become a means of redefining the status of employees in many workplaces, creating new divisions across categories by separating women and men, young and old, skilled and unskilled and married or single

---

<sup>67</sup> For statistics on marriage and divorce see Nadine Lefaucher, *Rapport sur la situation des familles monoparentales en France*, GRASSETESCO, 1988, pp. 1-21.

<sup>68</sup> This analysis of part-time employment is based on Margaret Maruani and Chantal Nicole, *La Flexibilité dans le commerce: Temps de travail ou mode d'emploi?* Working Papers of the Laboratoire de Sociologie du Travail et des Relations Professionnelles, CNAM, 1988.

<sup>69</sup> Jensen, 'The Limits of "and the" Discourse', p. 166.

<sup>70</sup> Between 1981 and 1985 the number of temporary contracts went from 985,000 to 1,420,000 and increased by another 18 per cent in 1986. The new legislation, acknowledging and accepting this kind of employment contract, was designed to prevent employers from using temporary workers for jobs which were normally filled by employees with regular contracts, as well as to regulate the wage rates and social benefits in the direction of equality. For a full discussion see *Liens Sociaux* # 9984, 1987, p. 14 and *passim*.

workers. Women more than men, young more than the mature, those workers termed unskilled more than those with qualifications and women living with a man more than women living alone are part-time and temporary workers. The differences are particularly striking in the latter category. Women living with their spouse are less likely to achieve the modicum of economic independence coming from full-time work. For example, of single mothers in the labour force, 82 per cent are employed full time whereas for mothers living with their spouse only 63 per cent work full time.

The earning situation of part-time workers is seriously inferior to that of full-time, not simply in absolute terms but relatively as well. Temporary and part-time employees are excluded from the routes upon which career and salary advancement depend—for example, seniority.<sup>71</sup> Incomes are also affected, because many employers differentiate between full-time and part-time employees in their employment classification schemas or in the ways that they pay commissions.<sup>72</sup> Studies of employers' motivations reveal a recognition that part-time workers are more likely to be transitory employees (because they cannot live on the salary they earn) and therefore likely to pay less attention to collective organizing in order to gain improved working conditions, salaries, or other benefits.

For all of these reasons, analysts have concluded that a new employment status is being created for many women and not simply a new time schedule.<sup>73</sup> Employers' enthusiasm for part-time and temporary workers in both the industrial and service sectors has meant an increase in the number of women without job security; a decline in qualification which does not depend on any skill differentials but simply on the terms of employment; and a continued wage gap, since part-time workers both earn lower wages and receive less in other forms of remuneration.

With regard to unemployment, the situation of women has also deteriorated. As more women have entered the paid labour force, in part because of the job creation described above, they have also entered the ranks of the unemployed more than men. Since 1974 women's unemployment rate has always been higher than men's. This pattern holds for all categories of the labour force, for all levels of education

---

<sup>71</sup> The role of seniority is extremely important for income. While women's salaries rise more slowly than men's in the younger age groups, this difference in the rate of increase disappears with age, an observation which is attributed to seniority (INSEE, 1987, p. 135). Therefore, if new kinds of hiring practices mean that women do not accumulate seniority, the effects will continue to haunt them throughout their working lives.

<sup>72</sup> For example, in everyday language as well as in terms of remuneration, part-time and full-time employees doing the same job are differentially recognized. In stores the full-time employees are considered the skilled workers, with professional qualifications (a salesperson, for example) while a part-time worker is considered less professional and necessary only as a stop-gap. In many stores, then, full-time employees receive a substantial commission in addition to their salaries, while regular part-time employees receive only a small bonus. Seasonal part-time employees are the worst off, receiving only their salaries. Maruani and Nicole, *La Flexibilité*, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> This is the argument of Maruani and Nicole, *La Flexibilité*.

and training, for all age groups, and among immigrant workers. In other words, women are more likely than men to be unemployed and to stay unemployed for longer periods of time.<sup>74</sup>

### Labour Market Policy

The following conclusions can be drawn for this discussion of women's work in France. Women have clearly entered the labour force in large numbers and they intend to remain. Moreover, if job creation has favoured women, it is because of their massive concentration in the tertiary sector, which has ballooned at the same time that areas of traditional male employment—industry and construction—have contracted. Yet, this restructuring of the French economy, by sector and also by type of employment, has not brought an equalization of the situation of women and men. Service-sector employment is very often part-time or temporary employment. Even the newly created industrial jobs frequently result from conversion of full-time to part-time positions which only women living with a man are likely to be able to accept. Therefore, labour force segmentation, low wages and economic dependence within the family remain the lot of French women; their situation can be said to have become even more difficult over the last two decades. And, even as this statistical profile indicates, the patterns have not happened by chance but have followed strategic decisions taken by the major actors in the French economy, a scene from which the women's movement—for the reasons enumerated in the first section of this article—has been relatively absent.

Labour market policy in France since 1945 has been consistent in promoting measures for formal equality, following from the discourse of the Left about women's emancipation through participation in the paid labour force. Conscious of the discriminatory effects of a *laissez-faire* labour market, unions and Left parties, which held the balance of power during the Resistance and Liberation, inserted their long-standing demand for equal pay for equal work into the programme of the first postwar governments. The Constitution of 1946 (which organized the Fourth Republic) affirmed the 'right to work' for all French citizens, as did that of the Fifth Republic in 1958. During the 1960s and 1970s there was a series of reforms, following the lead of the European Community, intended to generate gender equality.<sup>75</sup>

It was, however, the failure of this type of statute to overcome the

---

<sup>74</sup> *Données Sociales*, p. 132.

<sup>75</sup> France ratified Convention 100 of the International Labour Organization in 1952 and the Treaty of Rome of the European Community in 1957, both of which banned pay discrimination on the basis of sex. A 1971 ordinance against discrimination on the basis of age was followed in 1972 by one enjoining equal pay for work of equal value. Enforcement procedures followed a year later. In 1975 discrimination in hiring and firing was prohibited. Then in 1976 France supported the Council of Europe's affirmation of the need to eliminate both direct and indirect discrimination based on sex or family status.

systemic effects of divided labour markets which led to the passing of the *loi Roudy* in 1983. The basic principle is that women may not be (with rare exceptions) excluded from a job solely on the basis of their sex or the supposed characteristics of that sex. All workers must be treated equally (although special provisions for pregnancy and maternity leave and facilities for breast-feeding were permitted for women only). Unions, as well as women, could make complaints about company practices, and companies and unions were responsible for designing procedures for change, after consultation with their female employees and the state.<sup>76</sup>

This law, together with other steps taken by the Ministry of the Rights of Women in the first half of the 1980s, reflected an egalitarian feminist discourse which located blockages to full workplace equality not simply in hiring and pay practices but also in differences in schooling and training and in long-standing attitudes about women's work. Therefore, the Ministry spent as much effort in encouraging school-girls to study science and take up careers in new technology fields as it did in passing legislation against sex discrimination.

State strategies have been predicated on the notion that the labour market is an entity which responds to training and skills. Therefore, women's labour-market difficulties are interpreted as due primarily to their lack of credentials. From the governments of Giscard d'Estaing in the 1970s to those of François Mitterrand in the 1980s, policy branches of the state, whether in the Ministry of Labour, Rights of Women or Social Affairs, directed their efforts to the training of women for the labour force and to the provision of infrastructure to overcome the burdens of childcare.

### A Dual Society

Yet, these moves in the direction of equality were simultaneously undermined by the labour market policy of various branches of the state. By the late 1970s notions about a 'dual society' in which there would be a well-paid core of skilled workers and a periphery of temporary, part-time and/or low-paid workers began to appear in the debates among neo-liberal ideologues and to penetrate the state. In these analyses, which focused on the rapidly rising rate of unemployment after 1974, 'women' appeared as one of the categories of the periphery. The notion underpinning all these analyses was that there was not a single labour market, but several, and that social groups were differentially located within these markets. Therefore, in 1982, when the Left government extended employment and welfare protection to part-time workers and in 1986 when it acquiesced to the wider use of temporary workers, it was clearly stating that it accepted the reconciliation of its social agenda with the continued existence of a segmented labour market with women located at its periphery. These ideas about the dual labour market depended, in part and ironically, on the legacies of the discourse of 'difference' and 'specific-

---

<sup>76</sup> On the role of workplace representatives in the design of programmes to overcome discrimination see Jane Jenson, 'The Limits of "and the" Discourse', pp. 161-63

ity' which revolutionary and syndicalist feminism had introduced earlier. But where feminists had used these concepts to criticize existing gender relations, in the context of a weakened movement and governmental and union forces moving to the Centre, this very representation of women could be turned against women. It came to be used to rationalize the continuity of unequal gender relations.

Since the 1970s official government policy has been that every woman must have a real 'choice' between working and staying at home. This position, founded on notions of gender difference, has eclipsed the notion of a 'right to work' in political programmes.<sup>77</sup> For example, governmental acceptance of labour-market segmentation in the 1980s was in part based upon a profoundly non-egalitarian understanding of the 'difference' and 'specificity' of women workers—their lower training, their supposed fondness for part-time work, their childcare responsibilities, and their need for special programmes to honour the double burden. The wide-ranging impact of this representation of women's 'difference' is clearly revealed, therefore, even in the ways in which the equality policies of the French state have been implemented.

In October 1988 the Court of Justice of the European Community issued a finding against the French government for its continued support of policies which promoted or maintained inequalities between female and male workers. Singled out by the Court were a series of special 'protections' of women workers—including days off for the care of sick children and for the opening of the school year and rest periods—which were not available to fathers and/or men, and yet were not related to pregnancy and childbirth. The French government's justification of such single-sex benefits was that they reflected the 'realities' of a family division of labour, in which mothers bore the burden of childcare. While there is always a tension between the reality of women's double burden and the utopian hope that parental responsibilities will be more widely shared, the acceptance of a sexual division of labour by the French government and by the social partners which negotiated such 'protections' in collective agreements reflected a lack of desire on the part of much of that apparatus to challenge sexual inequality.

---

<sup>77</sup> The policy goal of giving women a choice about paid work has been less of a motivation with regard to the situation of single mothers, however. There the aim is clearly to foster economic independence. Therefore, government strategy has focused on giving single mothers the means to earn a living to support themselves and their families. See Lefaucher, *Les Familles monoparentales*, p. 49. This policy has long dominated French policy towards single mothers. In the 19th century, municipal programmes to discourage mothers from giving up their (usually) illegitimate babies provided sufficient money to support the cost of the child (money for a wet nurse, for layettes, for milk, etc) but clearly assumed that women would themselves provide the rest of the family income. See Jane Jenson, 'Paradigms and Political Discourse: Labour and Social Policy in France and the USA before 1914', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, xxii, # 2, 1989.

## Conclusion

In the harsh light of 1988, twenty years after the 'revolutionary moment' of 1968, the women's movement in France no longer existed in a form recognizable to *soixante-huitards*. Feminists inquired what remained of their autonomous struggles. One area in which some limited success had been achieved was party politics. The recognition by the Socialists throughout the 1970s that their hopes depended on women's voting behaviour was a spur to action after the 1981 victory. While women formed a smaller percentage of the legislature than in any other major European country apart from the UK, the Socialist President and his Cabinet Ministers were willing to appoint women to Cabinet and governmental positions.<sup>78</sup> That fourteen per cent of the highest governmental posts went to women in the first Mitterrand presidency is testimony to this.<sup>79</sup> In addition, where the central party organization retained control over the naming of candidates, there was a tendency to designate women. For example, Europarlimentary lists have been used by the parties of the Left to give evidence of their attention to promoting women. In 1989 the PCF and PS allocated slightly more than one-quarter of their places to women, while the *Verts* list was 50 per cent female.<sup>80</sup> These actions reflect a quite straightforward calculation that a gender gap, in which women favour the Left, now exists.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, this gap is important to the future of several of the Left parties.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> It took until 1981 (5.9%) for the percentage of women in the legislature to reach that of 1946 (5.4%). Despite the good words of all parties about increasing the numbers of female candidates, 1986 produced only 6%. There has been a change at the municipal level, however. Although a law proposed by Giscard's Secretary in charge of women's issues, Monique Pelletier, passed unanimously in 1979, it was not promulgated by Prime Minister Raymond Barre. The law would have limited to 80% the number of people of the same sex on any municipal electoral list. Mitterrand reintroduced the legislation but it was overturned by the *Conseil Constitutionnel* in 1982. There has been a steady increase of women becoming municipal councillors and mayors, however.

<sup>79</sup> This percentage was higher than that of the UK, Italy and West Germany, although much lower than for the Nordic countries. See Lovenduski, *Women and European Politics*, pp. 231–32.

<sup>80</sup> This statistic has not increased at all since 1979. In both 1979 and 1989 the PCF gave women 27% of its places and the PS gave 26%. However, the Communists were more willing to put women higher on the list, so 43% of its current delegation is female while only 27% of the Socialists' is. The *Verts*' decision to appoint women is part of their general strategic effort to recuperate the energy of the new social movements of the 1970s. See Jane Jenson, 'From *Baba Cool* to a *Vote Utilité*: The Trajectory of the French *Verts*', *French Politics and Society*, vol. 7, # 3, 1989.

<sup>81</sup> The French gender gap looks much more like the American one, in which women favour the Left party, than it does the situation in the UK where the reverse has been true. See Nicky Hart, 'Gender and the Rise and Fall of Class Politics', *New Left Review* 175, 1989, p. 22 for the UK; and Harold Brackman, Steven Erie and Martin Rein, 'Wedded to the Welfare State: Women Against Reaganite Retrenchment', in Jane Jenson *et al.*, *Feminization of the Labour Force*, pp. 214ff. for the USA. Mossuz-Lavau and Sineau document the background to this gender gap in *Enquête sur les femmes et la politique en France*.

<sup>82</sup> In the 1988 presidential election the Left/Right gender gap was small (51/49). But for Mitterrand it was important. In the first round there was a 6% difference between the behaviour of women (37% of whom voted for him) and men. The gap was particularly large among young people, where 45% of women under 25 years old but only 27% of men voted for Mitterrand, and similarly among students, where the gap was 19%. For

In general, then, the new representation of women and their interests first mobilized by revolutionary and syndicalist feminism has had its effects. It is no longer possible for any political formation with the slightest pretension to being progressive to ignore gender differences among French citizens. French women can no longer be represented exclusively through their familial roles (which was the traditional Right's favourite way of addressing them) or as ungendered members of the working class (where the Left tended to assimilate them in its universal category). French citizens, regardless of their family situation or class location, must now be addressed at least sometimes in gendered terms. Nor can such political formations reduce gender relations to the working of another, primary social relation. The social map shared by most progressive actors is now much more pluralistic, not simply differentiated by class and gender but increasingly cleaved by race, religion and region as well. The women's movement struggled hard to make this message clear—and this is its success.

At the same time, however, revolutionary feminism's representation of women's 'difference' and syndicalist feminism's representation of 'specificity' came to be incorporated into business, government and even union acceptance of labour market segmentation and 'flexibility'. This perversion of the discourse of feminism, used even by the movement's erstwhile allies to maintain rather than overcome gender inequalities, remains one of the serious issues facing feminism at the end of the 1980s. Yet the women's movement which must face this issue is one much weakened, both by social and economic restructuring and by internal conflict.

Where, then, does this story leave French feminism? The answer depends upon whether one thinks that the politics of the 1970s, which was in part a politics of autonomous social movements, represents the only, or the best, alternative for the future. If that is the case, the future of French feminism—and of French women—looks bleak indeed. If, however, one thinks that the social movements of the 1970s played a similar role to that of the Angel Gabriel, announcing the end of one societal paradigm but not necessarily providing the model for its replacement, then the situation may be somewhat less bleak. There is still space for careful mobilization.

The task now is to prevent the newly pluralistic social map, which feminists struggled to draw, from being given a hierarchical reading, in which 'difference' remains a rationale for marginality and in which talk of 'solidarity' becomes an acceptance of structured inequalities. This means that feminists must give up any tendency to see only a single difference (by privileging patriarchy over all other social relations) or to speak as if *des femmes* were a single social group.

---

<sup>82</sup> (cont.)

the Verts' candidate, Antoine Waechter, the difference was even greater in relative terms, with 5% of women and only 3% of men supporting him. On the right too there were important differences among candidates. Jean-Marie LePen received 17% of men's votes but only 10% of women's. See the survey data and analysis reported in *Le Monde, Dossiers et Documents* for the 1988 presidential elections, May 1988, pp. 41, 46-47.

The remnants of the MLF may have begun such a task. For example, by finally turning their attention to the gender division of labour in the workplace and the dangerous segmenting effects of economic restructuring, MLF-style feminists, especially from the *letto de classe* wing, seek to understand the complexity of social relations which constitute a gendered, and racially differentiated, working class. In these actions they join the long-standing concerns of the remnants of syndicalist and egalitarian feminisms, which are now trying to come to grips with the conditions of economic restructuring often accepted by Left parties and unions. Feminists inside the state and political parties have now to struggle to turn back initiatives of both Left and Right governments to reinstitute natalism in family policy and social policy more generally. All these efforts are positive but they merely point out the need for greater vigilance. Even if the women's movement is no longer the social force it was, feminists can still continue to refine its messages and insist on their importance for the current political context. As a new centrist politics takes form in the state and the PS, feminists must be present—in their own groups, among progressive forces, and in the state—to promote an alternative reading of the pluralistic social map, one which makes it possible to recognize differences, to be sure, but which insists that a fundamental social equality has to be constructed to underpin such differences.

"Economics: All you ever  
wanted to know"  
*The Wall Street Journal*

"In a class of its own"  
*The Guardian*

## THE NEW PALGRAVE: A DICTIONARY OF ECONOMICS

Phone 01-379 4687 for our colour brochure or fill in the coupon below  
and post to: Petra Green, Macmillan Press, \*FREEPOST, Stockton  
House, Melbourne Place, London WC2B 4LF.

\*(UK only)

Mr/Ms \_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Post Code \_\_\_\_\_



# Blackwell

## *Charisma*

CHARLES LINDHOLM

Using a combination of theory and case studies, taking into account group dynamics, individual character, and the social milieu, this book examines the subject of charisma. Concentrating on specific cases: Hitler's Germany, Manson's family, Jonestown and others, the author seeks to explain this seemingly irrational phenomena.

248 pages, Hardback £25.00 (1-55786-021-1)  
April 1990

## *Socialism in Britain*

JOHN CALLAGHAN

This much-needed overview of the history of socialist ideology, policy and institutions in Britain examines the relationship between socialist ideas and institutions since the founding of the Fabian Society in 1884, elucidating the thought of socialist writers from the Webbs and Shaw through Cole and Orwell to Crossland.

288 pages, Paperback £11.95 (0-631-16472-3)  
Hardback £35.00 (0-631-16471-5) 1990

## *Sandinistas*

*The Party and the Revolution*

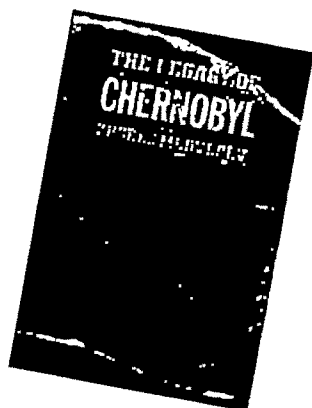
DENNIS GILBERT

Turning on the continuing tension between ideology and circumstances, this book provides the reader with a balanced interpretive account of possibly the most influential revolutionary movement of recent times.

'There are few books that present as judicious an appraisal for a broad audience.'

*Times Higher Education Supplement*

256 pages, Paperback £18.95 (1-55786-072-6) March 1990



## *The Legacy of Chernobyl*

ZHORES MEDVEDEV

The first comprehensive technical analysis of the long-term natural and global effects of the Chernobyl accident is provided here, including an examination of the changing economic and political priorities within the Soviet Union following the disaster.

343 pages, Hardback £19.95 (0-631-16955-5)  
April 1990

Not for sale in the USA or Canada

## *The Last Colony in Africa*

*Diplomacy and the Independence of Rhodesia*

MICHAEL CHARLTON

Michael Charlton's book is an important primary source on this key colonial event of post-war British history, featuring first-hand evidence of many of the major figures involved including Lord Carrington, Robert Mugabe, Pk Botha, Ian Smith and Joaquim Chissano.

176 pages, Hardback £19.95 (0-631-17044-8)  
May 1990

Basil Blackwell

# PERSPECTIVES ON POWER FROM ROUTLEDGE

## Reactions to the Right

Edited by Barry Hindess, Australian National University

In recent years as philosophies of the New Right gained popular approbation, the dearth of convincing alternatives became increasingly apparent. This thought-provoking book examines the attempts made to rebuild the theoretical foundations of socialism for the 1990s and beyond.

May 1990 208pp

Hb 0-415-03384-5 £30.00 Pb. 0-415-03385-3 £10.99

## The Fatal Conceit

### The Errors of Socialism

F.A. Hayek

'...as passionate and dispassionate as anything he has written. As well as adding up to a powerful *summa* against socialism, it is a fully accessible account of many of the main strands of Mr Hayek's thinking. Politicians...no longer have any excuse for ignoring what he has actually said...One of the outstanding political philosophers of this century has written a concise summation of his work Hayek for everyone. It deserves to be read.' *The Economist*

March 1990. 192pp Pb. 0-415-04187-2 £9.99

## Armenia

### The Survival of a Nation

Christopher J. Walker

The new, updated edition of this pioneering modern history charts the factors currently fueling Armenian nationalism.

'This book is lucidly written, and he has said almost all there is to say, at the moment, about this suffering yet remarkably resilient and attractive people' *The Economist*

April 1990 480pp

Hb 0-7099-0210-7 £30.00 Pb. 0-415-04684-X £12.99

## The Law

Jeremy Waldron, University of California, Berkeley

In this lively analysis of the British political and legal systems, Jeremy Waldron examines the interaction of legal theory and political practice. Arguing that the rule of law implies responsibilities not only for the individual but also for the state, this illuminating text uses contemporary case studies to show that legislation should, above all, deserve the respect of the citizen.

*Theory and Practice in British Politics*

April 1990 240pp Hb 0-415-01426-3 £30.00

Pb. 0-415-01427-1 £8.99

## Life Stories of the Nicaraguan Revolution

Denis L.D. Heyck, Professor of Spanish  
at Mundelein College, Chicago

Describing Nicaraguan life during wartime, this book is made up of a series of conversations which took place over a period of three years. From Violeta Chamorro to the mother of Daniel Ortega, these stories give a voice to a people who, although suffering the deprivations of civil war, have survived largely through their own faith, whether that faith was placed in the Christian church, the Sandinista government, or the newly elected UNO.

March 1990 336pp illus.

Hb 0-415-90210-X £35.00

Pb. 0-415-90211-8 £9.99

Available from all bookellers. In case of difficulty  
please contact James Wilson, Routledge,  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE.  
Telephone 01-583 9855



*review*

Paul Buhle

## America: Post-Modernity?

Fredric Jameson understands the presence of [the] sedimented historical tradition when he argues that all works of popular culture have utopian dimensions that enable them to critique contemporary power relations. But even Jameson relegates the historical work of popular culture to a 'political unconscious', an uncomprehending desire to give concrete form to the absent cause that might make sense out of the incoherence of a world without believable historical narratives. But the 'empty chair' that Jameson believes to be waiting for a future history and politics is already occupied.

George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*<sup>1</sup>

But is this what an achieved utopia looks like? Is this a successful revolution? Yes, indeed! What do you expect a 'successful' revolution to look like? It is paradise. Santa Barbara is a paradise; Disneyland is a paradise; the US is a paradise.

Jean Baudrillard, *America*<sup>2</sup>

A new, strange and remarkable era is upon us. Revolutions so long anticipated that they had grown unreal now shatter assumptions in every corner of the Left. But these are emphatically not the uprisings expected by grizzled Cold War social democrats or by ever-youthful Trotskyist dreamers. The revolutionaries can be seen crooning 'All You Need Is Love', perhaps phonetically, from the Bulgarian; or wearing 'I Love New York' sweat shirts, figuratively or literally crying out for the necessary technology and the postmodern ambience to attain a mass subjectivity that no Leftist of any description would have imagined, let alone demanded, forty years ago. Television historian-critic David Marc puts it this way: liberal intellectuals had two enemies since 1950, Communism and Television; now that Television has conquered Communism, no one quite knows what to think or do about it.<sup>3</sup>

We may be forgiven if we are, under these extreme circumstances, inclined to treat Jean Baudrillard as an early guide to post-modern or post-historical space who, however, despaired too early, and on that account came to identify with the landscape which his perceptions had by now flattened out into a limitless plain. His sparkling earlier works, which marked a break with the Left's productivist visions and in some ways summarized the New Left's cultural insights, have 'arrived' at a moment when readers far from radical most appreciate their savour. A now soul-weary Baudrillard is at long last discovered

in the hyper-technical society he loves most, as ironic prophet of triumphalist recuperation.

### The Trail of a Comet

But even the trail of a comet is a part of the comet, and the glare of Baudrillard's trajectory casts light on the ideas and events around it. We can see them best as the mirror of a 'mass society' critique developed in the 1950s academies and still basic to conservative or liberal hand-wringing about commercial popular culture. Coming from the other direction, a critique of Marxist traditions, Baudrillard and his fellow-thinkers brilliantly inverted the conclusions of both. They paid, however, a heavy price for this stroke. They could manage their perceptions only at an overwhelmingly symbolic level, without much feeling for class, and even less for race or gender. Theorized in this fashion, both worker and capitalist, white and non-white, male and female existed in an abstract form, just as history existed only to be swept away.

A newer school of radical thought, long in the making, can see the writings of Baudrillard (along with those of Lyotard and Castoriadis among others) as a useful and inevitable phase now ripe for transcendence. The 'eternal present' of postmodernism becomes a provocative illusion whose penetration reveals a rich vein of scarcely observed micro-realities constituting nothing less than a hidden 'inner history' of our times.<sup>4</sup>

George Lipsitz, who may be taken as a spokesman for the newer tendency, believes that the more politically consistent theoretical efforts of Fredric Jameson and others have gone far to set the scene for this next stage of interpretation, but without escaping the distancing of postmodernism discourse from either historical detail or political practice. At stake is the notorious crisis of historical memory—the extreme difficulty of recovering collective memory, and hence collective political sensibility—in the postmodern age of polyvalent

---

<sup>1</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, Minneapolis. University of Minnesota, 1990, p. 231. \$14.95 Paperback.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *America*, translated by Chris Turner. London: Verso, 1988, p. 98. \$12.95 Paperback.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to David Marc for this caveat; and for the criticisms of my essay by Andrew Ross and Scott McLemee.

<sup>4</sup> One should credit, in the Anglo-American world, at least several of the groupings whose work over nearly two decades has helped prepare the way for the current effusion of historically precise popular culture studies. Pride of place and of actual volume goes to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, whose collective drawing upon various intellectual sources is helpfully described by Stuart Hall in 'Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems', in *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andre Lowe and Paul Willis, London, 1980. No such overarching influence can be named on the U.S. side, but *Cultural Correspondence* and *Social Text* (and circles of critics around them) began early in this direction, subsequently joined by at least a half-dozen new journals. Among other works of the first group, David Marc's *Demographic Vistas*, Philadelphia 1983, and his *Comic Visions*, London 1989, are certainly premonitory; Andrew Ross's *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*, London 1989, suggests the partial convergence of perspectives.

symbols. This crisis can be overcome, Lipsitz insists, through the self-conscious cultivation and investigation of cultural bi-focality, hybridizations which simultaneously authenticate and transcend existing vernaculars. To trace such cultures back to their origins, and draw out their subversive contents for the present day, suggests (although Lipsitz doesn't quite say it) something like a Transitional Programme for socialist cultural transformation.<sup>5</sup>

Placed against each other, *America* and *Time Passages* suggest, then, where we have been theoretically since the 1970s and where we may be going. Hardly anything will help us more in the many-sided dialogue of what we, in the West, have to contribute specifically, beyond material and moral support, to the great changes at hand in the East. Our work will also help prepare one side of our own political trajectory.

### Tocqueville Revisited

*America* is first of all a travel book, in the spirit of that most prestigious travel book, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Baudrillard refers to it often, quite naturally and without much irony. Tocqueville meant by 'democracy' a middle-class society startlingly unlike his own contemporary France most of all in the sense of absences: peasantry, proletarian, idle aristocracy, formal culture, the overbearing State, and so forth. Classless precisely *because* it was so middle class, American democracy did not threaten property and the propertied did not threaten democracy. Tocqueville had captured, in short, what American elites and not a few others urgently wanted to believe about themselves and their successful escape from European-style class struggle.

We tend to forget that *Democracy in America* has been variously received at different points in time. It achieved its maximum prestige, not surprisingly, after the Second World War, when the U.S. celebrated the differences that had spared it Communism or Fascism, and proclaimed the 'American Century' as the fate of the world. Subsequent critics have pointed to the weak points of Tocqueville's text. First of all, he treated slavery and the South as part of another civilization, rather than one indisputably linked, by history and economics, to the growth, political leadership and fundamental cultural character of the American republic. While all but ignoring the central role of the African-American, Tocqueville also bypassed a quality of American society perhaps most frequently noted by other travellers of his day or ours: the self-assertion of women, and the inevitable 'war between the sexes'. And he ignored, during the era shortly following the first workingmen's political parties and the first city general strike (in Philadelphia, 1835), the distinct world of the handicraftsman, the proud and distinctive 'American worker', along with his rural cousin the yeoman.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'The Cultural Logic of Capital', *New Left Review* 146, July–August 1984, pp. 70–71.

<sup>6</sup> See Sean Wilentz, 'Many Democracies: On Tocqueville and Jacksonian America', in Abraham S. Eisenstadt, ed., *Reconsidering Tocqueville's Democracy in America*, New Brunswick 1988. On the wider question of shifting political trends in U.S. historiography during the Cold War years, see Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream*, New York 1988.

Tocqueville provided, in all, a shorthand version of the Master Narrative of the supposedly conflict-free (or at least, European-style conflict-free) American middle class. Baudrillard makes the most of this thesis. He has come, Tocqueville in postmodern garb, to reinscribe the large mythologies, and to insist upon their essential correctness. But he speaks in the first person, also earnestly attempting to relive the explorer's fantasy: to look on the New World with New Eyes.

To do so, he must recapitulate the basic European observation, that the United States has no history that counts, no introspection at all, no time or interest or capacity for pausing over the details of what is—after all—no more than a few hundred years. And *no need to pause*: 'America has no identity problem' (76). Its inhabitants live in their automobiles as they elide exhilaration and acceleration. Covering immense physical distances, they outrun the shadow of the combined human past, entering a hyperreality where everything can simultaneously be both technologically transformed and 'pure' or 'natural' *as at the beginning*. They are—to borrow a phrase from another author—'skyscraper primitives', the only tribe preserved (by perpetual change) sufficiently for twenty-first-century anthropological examination. Baudrillard, the archeologist of modern sensation, frankly craves this society, where immediacy is king. ('What would Americans do if it wasn't for their sensashuns?' asked literary comedian Josh Billings rhetorically in the 1870s.<sup>7</sup>) It is, for him, the only interesting place on the planet. And only the American academics, he insists, fail to recognize these central facts of contemporary life.

Engaging with this view as the epitome of Baudrillard's theoretical interventions over the last twenty years, we may take *America* more seriously than he does. He wrote the text quickly, and (to take seriously his asides about gulping down whiskey) distractedly—though perhaps no more distractedly than the average American watches television. Baudrillard seems to drift on and on, suddenly revealing flashes of his famous acuity and then drifting back into airy if sometimes clever generalizations.

In *America*, we come to appreciate Andreas Huyssen's remark that poststructuralist commentary is above all a commentary by European thinkers *on the United States*, where the bonds of history have been earliest sundered.<sup>8</sup> Baudrillard began with a grand effort to put together semiology and Marxism. Building upon that very American and unMarxist text, Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Baudrillard asserted that the proliferation of commodities constituted a system of signs governing society through a new and distinct logic in which 'symbolic exchange' rules. Here, 'hyperreality' increasingly replaced reality, as the 'principle of simulation' emerged triumphant.

<sup>7</sup> Henry W. Shaw, 'Josh Billings Meditations', in Walter Blair, ed., *Native American Humor*, New York 1960, p. 427.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington 1986, p. 190

'Meaning' in the old sense, requiring some depth of thought and experiences, vanished in the thinness of surface reality.<sup>9</sup>

Baudrillard has frequently been interrogated on two points, the apparent absence of critique of his own assumptions (are not they, too, part of the superficial observation?) and the absence of any way out. Douglas Kellner, an astute critic of Baudrillard, suggests that this may be the inevitable fate of 'hypercriticism', critique as a 'desperate attempt to imitate and surpass critical models', which themselves tend increasingly toward a mere style of avant-garde expression. Even if so, the value of the exercise will remain, above all for the Left, because the precise aspects of culture apprehended had been so undertheorized in the Marxism of the 1950s to middle 1960s.

### The Society of the Spectacle

And yet Baudrillard's texts arrive as latecomers, or postponed confirmations, for those with longish political memories. The 1970 publication of the situationist text, *The Society of the Spectacle*, symptomized, for many of us New Left intellectuals/activists at the time, a distinct stage of necessary theorization. Not that the theses contained even in Debord's text came out of the blue; on the contrary, his own sources in U.S. sociology were familiar, and the tense, expectant quality of the critical prose had been foreshadowed in the Marcuse-influenced sector of the underground press. *Society of the Spectacle* had, broadly speaking, lent the strengths and weaknesses of the pulsating intellectual counter-culture a new depth and a cogent (albeit somewhat vague) expression. From there, we thought, we could go further.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, the political message seemed to depend upon a rather apocalyptic vision of the consumer society's fate, in a classic the-worse-the-better scenario: so bad would the psychological situation of the masses grow under the ever-tightening regime of imposed consciousness that revolt (with a capital 'R') would arise in the streets.

---

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard. From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, London 1989, p. 21. I have used Kellner's lucid text extensively in the interpretation of Baudrillard that follows.

<sup>10</sup> Colin McCabe may be forgiven for the ignorance of his remark, in the 'Foreword' to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*, London 1988, that Situationism along with other French constructs was transported to the U.S. only after the political Left had retreated in the academy. As the first English-language publisher of *Society of the Spectacle* (*Radical America*, July 1970, an issue prepared by the Detroit printer-militant Fredy Perlman and his associates around the anarchistic Black and Red group), I was in the unique position of filling orders subsequent to the subscription mailing. The New Left was by no means gone by 1970, and the six thousand or so copies of *Society of the Spectacle* in print had an intensely political readership, from big city bookstores to insular state campus towns. Debord's New Left readership—like the more informal but probably more important Situationist impact (some of it inspired by earlier texts available, in small editions, in 1968–69) upon various underground presses—involved the kind of political meeting of minds that can take place only at a moment of high activity. We need more popular intellectual history, especially a close reading of the more cerebral underground papers like the early issues of Madison, Wisconsin's *Connections*, in which later media scholar Stuart Ewen figured heavily; or San Francisco's *Good Times*, for which Todd Gitlin wrote extensively. This was the hands-on school of Left postmodernism.

This belief, which seems so foolish in retrospect, was widely shared at the time; perhaps it was the inevitable first approximation of some strategic cultural concept beyond the blue-shirted brigades of the revolutionary proletariat.

The subtext (both of underground papers and of *Society of the Spectacle*), later to be identified roughly with the postmodern, actually hinted at something different and distinctly non-revolutionary, however. History, in the generally understood sense of movement toward some revolutionary (or even counter-revolutionary) goal, had seemed to come to an end, in the world of accumulating images; and the critique of consciousness remained the great task ahead, the more so if the revolution failed. A multiplicity of other thinkers were to add methodological and some (unfortunately, much less) empirical substance to this perspective. It is surprising how, despite more than a decade of attacking Left positions and theories, Baudrillard has remained loyal to the main lines of the original critique. He has simply substituted for the messianic conclusion a permanent continuation of the present, and changed the valence of our commodity fetishism. The realm of cruel deception has become the realm of enchantment, and even the enchanters (American businessmen) become fascinating in their wizardry. Those once seen as victims—above all, the socially disenfranchised (women, racial minorities, etc.)—now become part of an almost perfect spectacle.

So it must seem, not only to Baudrillard but to the many millions from Eastern Europe to Latin America, Asia and Africa who see America via television. America = excitement, the way only the global centre of wealth and communications can excite. And self-realization, in some unspecified but vivid sense. Against those contemporary world myths, no amount of demystification is likely to succeed at the moment.

But contra Baudrillard, it is not merely American professors who fail to appreciate their society in quite that way. Our cars are stuck in traffic, and we stare vacantly out the window at the other cars and we see—women driving to work, vastly larger numbers of them than ever before. They look anxious and a bit weary; we wonder about home life, i.e., the latest contestations of the 'Sex War' whose profoundly materialist as well as ideological stakes have not much to do with Baudrillard's favoured concept of 'seduction'. We glance at the people on foot (the truest sign of poverty in America) waiting for buses that hardly run at all, or just standing around waiting; they have dark skin, in a hundred hues. 'Each group symbolically rises to the top,' says Baudrillard (p. 83). But only in symbols (sports star, entertainer)—unless you're white.

Somewhere out there, beyond or really between suburban vistas, we glimpse what remains of the countryside, a depressing spectacle which reminds us of the continent's approximately fifty thousand toxic dumps (true, 37 have been purportedly cleaned up). This seems the big metaphor of the age, the more so in Baudrillard's beloved desert, which for possibly a millennium held flourishing pre-



Columbian settlements and now—water diverted, migrating birds killed off—seems destined to be the final resting place of the world's largest nuclear dump.

If Baudrillard insists that 'America is powerful and original; America is violent and abominable. We should not seek to deny either of these aspects, nor reconcile them', (p. 88) we can see his point in any given episode of our most vital and most representative 1980s mass culture creation, *Miami Vice*. Fashion, violence, music, layered desperation and resonant cultural pluralism in the age of drugs is what we're all about. If he remarks that everything appears to be at the surface level, with all the democracy and intelligence of a public parking lot, if he uncovers the secret in the integrated circuit of 'frantic self-referentiality', we can perhaps appreciate that he was *destined* to make this level of observation—and to fail to go beyond it. Polemical critiques ever closer to advertising slogans of recycled messages, '[l]osing critical energy and growing apathetic himself', says Douglas Kellner of him, 'he ascribes apathy and inertia to the universe. Imploding into entropy, Baudrillard attributes imploding and entropy to the experience of (post) modernity.'<sup>11</sup>

Too bad he ran out of energy quite so soon. He says that we Americans are born millennarians, more recently inclined to be bored with catastrophe. Perhaps. Certainly, that is the Yuppie world-view, an ironic posture that Andrew Ross has rightly identified in Baudrillard himself as 'a critique of excess, of hyperinformation, of over-representation [but] . . . nowhere a critique of the excesses of a centralized elite in power.'<sup>12</sup> The vital tension is not, however, destined to endure.

Baudrillard seems not to grasp the historic ramifications of his own perception that the triumphant or terrified sense of lost identity—no traditions, no history, no horizons—is not a development from, but only the other side of apocalyptic thought, a dark twin in the cycle that has been played out again and again on these shores. We (and I am speaking, for the moment, of my rural Yankee antecedents) *saw* the devil two hundred years ago, as Baudrillard has never been privileged to see him. Black slaver, Indian-killer, forest-killer, *barbarian by design* but democrat by self-designation, this figure was unembarrassed at the centre of the culture's popular self-preservation. As Constance Rourke noted long ago, Sade's fantasies pale before the literary accounts of the first American humourists, the 'Old Southwest' pioneers who wrote lightly of respectable women gouging out each other's eyes, boatmen eating corpses to cure indigestion, and the roasting alive of entire Indian tribes. Scholars have only begun to explore the mirror-opposite counterpart of a women's literature which refused the heart of

<sup>11</sup> Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard*, p. 180

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Ross, 'Baudrillard's Bad Attitude', in *Seduction and Theory*, edited by Diane Hunter, Urbana 1989, p. 224.

darkness and set forth potentially emancipating alternatives.<sup>3</sup>

Baudrillard is right (if by no means original) to say that Americans have, in a sense, never left the eighteenth century. In the emerging bourgeois republic, the construction of democratic representations rested upon inclusions and exclusions. To be included in the citizenry meant, abstractly, participation in the grand experiment of the discourse itself, a participation which all white men—for the first time in history—at least mythically shared. To be excluded meant not only exploitation but discursive absence. Most of the great social battles have been fought on that precise ground: an expansion of the discourse that would inevitably transform its entire nature (society free of patriarchal domination and/or racism meant a society more radically egalitarian than any on earth). All this seems somehow to precede or subsume the classic nineteenth to mid-twentieth century issues of class and national liberation. Now the old questions have come back again in the framework of cultural options.

Perhaps, then, the great showdown has only been postponed, and we are somehow still contesting the issues of the eighteenth century—'possessive individualism' writ large in vast tracts of the world, or a new concept of citizenship beyond the limits of the bourgeois republic. We either will be forced to the other path, the path not taken last time, or absolute catastrophe shall fall on the globe as surely as North America gulps a large portion of the world's energy expenditure each day. We see past and future in the rainforests which burn to create the humble hamburger patty.

### Politics of Polyvalence

If no utopian colonies had been planted when the descending sun of the Radical Reformation pointed West, no Women's Rights movement, no Abolitionism, no Radical Reconstruction, no 1877 Railroad Strike (or 1886 Eight Hour Movement) or Populism, or if these events had been as marginal to the main story as the scholars of the late 1940s and 1950s believed, Tocqueville would still have been a dubious guide by present estimations. As George Lipaitz reminds us, the reproduction of popular culture had already by the late nineteenth century drawn extensively upon, and redefined, existing American class cultures. A massive disruption of collective memory occurred within the social fragmentation of migration, change in language uses, proletarianization and urbanization. Commercialized leisure, such as the popular theatre and vaudeville followed by films and radio, reinforced the emergence of new publics with no necessarily shared history of their own.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Constance Rourke's classic, *American Humor*, New York 1931, in which she argues that the violence reveals behind laughter an essential loneliness, an inability to grasp the meaning of community. Against this very original, straight-faced humour of violence can be placed the popular women's literature, a cultural antidote whose early elements Cathy Davidson has acutely traced in her *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, New York 1986.

But they were not mostly middle-class publics, contrary to a post-Tocquevillian interpretation, and they did not absorb the cultural forms offered to them with blind and dumb acceptance. In short—and this is the vital point—they were not culturally ‘thinned’ in the sense that the disdainful critics of mass society, and the celebrative Baudrillard, imagine. On the contrary, as Stuart Hall has insisted, their responses and the net effect might best be seen as ‘transformations’ of existing tradition, through a constant and often spontaneous reworking of the old and the new, according to the appetites of the public and the shrewdness of entertainment entrepreneurs. Far from eradicating history, the negotiated results over the following generations often represent the partially successful effort to overcome the loss of memory. Dynamic hybridizations, growing out of the use of available technologies, arguably recuperated or reinvented class (and other) concepts of resistance, and of utopian aspirations.<sup>14</sup>

This is a rich cultural tapestry, to say the least, but not a scene of triumph. And there is the heart of the problem, theoretically and politically, yesterday and today. The multitude of young radical scholars who set themselves to crack the Master Narrative, for the sake of the conflicting truths about race, gender, region, and era, cannot escape the perpetual absorption of negative moments into the all-conquering system.

‘History is what hurts’, Fred Jameson wrote, and the motto might have been inscribed upon the dedication page of *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*.<sup>15</sup> Lipsitz does not mean the ‘History’ whose evident absence from the popular mind is now so often mourned in the higher academies: heroes, conquerors and their conquests, bourgeois statesmen and the State they erected. That is indeed well gone, save perhaps for its uses in the constructions of right-wing politics, where Honest Work and Better Days remains a powerfully hypostatized vision of the past which can somehow be recaptured.

Lipsitz has something entirely different in mind. As he recalls his teaching experiences, from the suburbs to the ghetto: ‘Inside my classes and in discussions with students outside them, I came to see that the dominant neo-conservative narrative of the 1980s conflicted with the experiences and memories of even those Americans who desperately wanted neo-conservatism to succeed.’ The Vietnam war, for instance, recalled not the heroics that Ronald Reagan proposed, but anxiety and agony. Students neither rightwing nor leftwing, just self-consciously powerless, found in thinking about popular culture of many kinds an opportunity to explore society, and themselves, in a way that formal politics could not, because ‘these texts unleashed the memories and experiences suppressed by the dominant rhetoric of their private and public lives. Here hope was still an issue, and happiness was still possible’ (xiii).

<sup>14</sup> Hall, quoted by Lipsitz, from ‘Notes on Deconstructing “the Popular”’, in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, edited Raphael Samuel, London 1981, p. 227.

<sup>15</sup> Jameson, quoted by Lipsitz from *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca 1981, p. 101.

This enlightenment of the teacher confirmed Lipsitz—sometime New Left activist, community-labour agitator, and radio disc-jockey—in his own instinctual path. *'A Rainbow at Midnight': Class and Culture in the Cold War*, his first book, crossgrained the vibrant mass cultural expressions of film noir, country music, Bebop and roller derby with the smashing defeat of the Left and the emergence of Rock 'n Roll. His second, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* followed the tortured trail of a rank-and-file civil rights activist in St. Louis, sorting out along the way the complex sources of resistance. *Time Passages*, a collection of essays, pushes the project another step in method and in subject.

### 'Marginal' Cultures

It is best realized in the particular. With evocations that echo Debord or Baudrillard but in opposite voice, Lipsitz elucidates the complexities of ritual and of popular cultural fusions which permit vast creative energy to break the spell of totalization. The 'marginal' (marginal, that is, to the Master Narrative) cultures are, on close examination, historically ubiquitous or at least a common feature of American life, most especially when the subaltern races, ethnic groups and gender intersect on the ground of fresh idioms.

He finds, in one lucid essay, the polyvalence of New Orleans 'Mardi Gras Indians', street festival performers who create a poetry and ritual of mixed African-American and cajun origins (among others), premised upon the images of the old Wild West shows—and resulting in some of the most dynamic Rock 'n Roll songs of the 1950s–60s (recaptured, in some cases, at the end of the 'eighties, by the likes of Cyndi Lauper). Lipsitz argues that if commercial culture has therefore destroyed a sense of 'origins' and 'authenticity' held dear to European-originated music, 'its biases toward repetition, nonlinear reasoning and immediacy make it a valuable conduit for oppositional narratives like those created by Mardi Gras Indians' (p. 249).

Then again, in 'Cruising around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles', Lipsitz traces the cross-currents of Chicano and other regional music over a half-century period, detailing many of the individuals who personally passed from one culture to another, or drew self-consciously from repertoires which emphasized textuality, inter-referentiality, and other versions of cultural collision. If this suggests at first glance post-modernism, the contents are very far from those usually found in literary or musical criticism. The referents pass wildly from *pachuco* zoot-suit clothes styles to 'low rider' automobiles to the sounds of Los Lobos. But unlike the version rock critics allow (and here Lipsitz especially scores Simon Frith), 'innovation' does not mean leaving the past but finding a new trail back to it. Los Lobos's inspiration, through their 1984 song 'How Will the Wolf Survive?', passes on to cajun and to Country & Western musicians, striving each in their own way to build some new monument against the tyranny of the master narratives.

Ethnic television (in the medium's early days), 'B' filmmaking, and the more familiar territory of women's literature and television narratives offer Lipsitz ample opportunity to further the theses of what he calls, in his final essay, 'Collective Memory in an Age of Amnesia'. He reminds us that the 'old but distinctive wounds' (the phrase is Marshall Berman's) that we wish to reopen are collective memories rife with suggestions. Anyone with a VCR and the smorgasbord of old images on cable television knows that those suggestions are being drawn upon in some way, at every moment, by a vast self-educating public.

'[M]arginal sensibility,' to Lipsitz, 'amounts to more than novelty or personal eccentricity; it holds legitimacy and power as a product of a real historical community's struggle with oppression. The "buried" narratives... about group identity, oppositional subculture and a desire for unity—amount to more than a political unconscious' (p. 159). Yes, but how much more? Every major cultural revolution has its counter-revolution, the commercial recuperation of turf typified by the monopolization and 'star system' rapidly created by the king-makers of national Rock 'n Roll. 'Counter-memory', the reconstruction of history from the details of the seemingly marginal experience, the unprestigious day-to-day lives of ordinary people, grows more fragile precisely as it builds toward the centre, toward a new picture of the whole with the political equations filled in.

In short, there has never been a Rock 'n Roll candidate for president, or a Rock 'n Roll-inspired General Strike. Lipsitz's claims for certain moments in the 1988 Jesse Jackson campaign, when the boundaries between farm, workingclass, black, brown, yellow, feminist, gay, even Jewish and Palestinian seemed to be giving way, stand out in the memory—because they are so exceptional, and so brief.

Lipsitz also makes no serious effort to grapple with that unphilosophical nihilism, Baudrillardian in its cynicism but altogether devoid of rapture, which reaches from the ghetto tenements to the suburban boulevards. Perhaps it is all too obviously the flip side of the records and tapes that give him hope, the draining out of the syncretic energies that he picturesquely describes. Perhaps he feels this subject is too obviously the domain of postmodern banality, or the personalization of the deep defeat out of which a new future may yet arrive.

### From Theory to Reality?

The dialogue between textual criticism and historical analysis takes on a particular urgency as the political assumptions of an epoch pass into crisis. The traditional strategies of the cultural critic become obviously problematic. What might be called heteronomy-from-below suddenly establishes new territory for a definition of the 'political'. But only a very small fraction of those who strive to deconstruct a previously stubborn reality have grappled with the idea of what an intervention might be. Outside the classroom, in the streets, the prestige of that kind of critical learning (rather than street-smarts or higher education-for-career) is at perhaps an all-time low.

In short, any emerging mass movement is as likely as usual to take the intellectuals along with everyone else (including the movement's participants) by surprise. That's not so bad in some ways: communities can and presumably will speak in their own voices. But intellectuals can make themselves useful if they work more on the 'Transitional Programme' for post-capitalist cultures, not only in their own countries, but internationally. How are fusion cultures of mixed old and new to operate in Eastern Europe? Can they mediate (or mitigate) flagrant ethnic tensions among teenage rock 'n rollers Lithuanian, Russian, Armenian, Polish and German? We have seen, already, beginnings of a new, culturally-defined internationalism of ecological defence in the Czech-Austrian-Hungarian human chain against the damming of the Danube; other examples will surely follow.

These are scarcely preliminary considerations. But we have reason to hope for a multitude of other uses of that fluidity Baudrillard observes in American life—a fluidity that Lipsitz calls a 'chorus of many voices and a land of a thousand dances' (p. 271). In this sense, more than in the possession of highly desired material goods themselves, the United States may be the domain of the postmodern promise. But the fulfilment of that promise can only be world-wide.

'Insofar as the old partial "minimal" demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism—and this occurs at each step,' wrote Trotsky in *The Death Agony of Capitalism*, the new International would advance 'a system of transitional demands', a programme whose task lay 'in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution'.<sup>16</sup> How far away we seem from those words, written a half-century ago. But how badly we need a statement of today's minimal demands. Only half-jokingly, the progressive postmodernist Couch Potatoes suggested a few years ago the drastic reduction of the so-called defence budget, with the money to be devoted to the creation of a really entertaining television network. Today we could say: instead of additional weaponry, free Cable (or satellite) TV for the world, with a shift of production funds from North to South that makes possible a real sharing of sitcoms, detectives and musical variety. These are internationalist values which make sense to the billions mobilized at their personal or community sets.

My favourite *New Left Review* issue, No. 52, already plunged past the economist aspect of the old formulation in analysing and celebrating the May events of France when (as Ernest Mandel had predicted) students and workers reacted to neo-capitalism with new forms of mobilization, seeking goals that any previous Marxist movement would have considered utopian in liberated self-expression. That was just over twenty years ago.<sup>17</sup> Now we are, perhaps, beyond that kind

<sup>16</sup> Leon Trotsky, 'The Death Agony of Capitalism', excerpted into *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*, edited by Isaac Deutscher (with the assistance of George Novack), New York 1964, pp. 258–59.

<sup>17</sup> 'Festival of the Oppressed: France 1968—Special Issue', *New Left Review* 52, November–December 1968.

of utopianism, with limitless horizons. Things don't look so good for the biosphere. But we can share our technologically mediated dreams, and our tasks of massive reconstruction.

We see no immediate revolutionary prospects today in the West, it is true. And yet we observe the unprecedented stirrings, more distinctively cultural than any since the late 1960s and more specific in needs for cultural expression. Perhaps—and not only because of the threats at hand—we have the impression that the events of the modern (or post-modern) period are drawing swiftly, unpredictably, towards some kind of conclusion.

Collets

## Collets Collets

### **Soviet Scene 1989** **One-Way Ticket to Democracy**

**V. Mezhenkov & E. Skelley (eds)**

Extracts (mainly complete) from  
*Izvestia, Pravda, New Times, Trud, Ogonyok, Moscow News, Smena, Novy Mir, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Literaturnaya Gazeta, Argumenty i Fakty, etc.*

"... a mine of insights. This 1989 survey of pieces from Soviet newspapers and journals provides a fascinating view of Soviet society."

Angus Macqueen, *The Independent*

**published annually**

£5.95

465pp

Obtainable from booksellers, Collets' bookshops or mail order (£6.95)  
Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northants NN8 2QT, U.K.

## Collets Collets

Collets

# CULTURAL POLITICS

## New Titles For 1990

### Postmodernism, politics and art

JOHN ROBERTS

Roberts offers a Marxist defence and analysis of postmodernism as an extension of the critical imperatives of art in the West today, and addresses such topics as painting, sexual difference and visual culture.

1990	208 pp	0 7190 3228 8	Hb £29.95
		0 7190 3230 X	Pb £9.95

### Reading landscape

Country-city capital

SIMON PUGH

Examines the historical aspects of the complex relationship of country, city and capital from the mid-eighteenth century. The essays cover painting, photography, popular culture, art, architecture and town and country planning.

1990	245 pp	0 7190 2979 1	Hb £29.95
		0 7190 3189 3	Pb £9.95

### From The Avengers to Miami Vice

Form and ideology in television series

DAVID BUXTON

Analyses the different British and American television series from the 1950s to the present day, discusses the underlying ideological strategy and seeks to establish TV criticism as a form of interpretative explanation.

1990	192 pp	0 7190 2993 7	Hb £29.95
		0 7190 2994 5	Pb £8.95

### Medieval literary politics

SHEILA DELANY

In an alternative to conventional medievalism, Delany looks at culture as pluralistic, contradictory and ideological, and examines the production of social meaning by medieval authors and modern critics

1990	191 pp	0 7190 3045 5	Hb £29.95
		0 7190 3230 X	Pb £9.95

### True Stories?

Documentary drama on radio, screen and stage

DEREK PAGET

Looks at the way in which 'true stories' often disrupt the boundary between fact and fiction. Paget uses many familiar programmes and films to illustrate past and contemporary practices in the UK and USA.

1990	185 pp	0 7190 2962 7	Hb £29.95
		0 7190 2963 5	Pb £8.95

### The end of the century party

Youth and pop towards 2000

STEVE REDHEAD

Offers an alternative perspective on popular music and youth culture in the 1980s and beyond. Illustrated with photographs by Kevin Cummins the book draws on interviews with disc jockeys, record magnates, musicians, producers and fans.

1990	192 pp	0 7190 2826 4	Hb £29.95
		0 7190 2827 2	Pb £9.95

*For a copy of our literature and drama catalogue  
please write to Deborah Smith at the address below.*

 **manchester**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS Oxford Road Manchester M13 9PL



Rodney Hilton

## Unjust Taxation and Popular Resistance

Historical materialism as a concept for understanding society, past, present and future, is under constant examination, by its adherents as much as by its opponents\*. Some of these discussions are stimulating, intellectually exciting and perhaps even useful for the definition of political strategies. Much space has been occupied by those who are primarily concerned with one side of the Marxist project—theory rather practice. Whether or not this distances them from contemporary political issues is not my concern; but I intend here to examine the importance of the concepts of historical materialism to the practice of the working historian.

Marxist historians have, on the whole, applied themselves to the interpretation of particular periods or specific problems, as in the case of the older generation formed in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. They have not often engaged explicitly in the definition of the theoretical principles which they have applied to their work. That has been left to what one might designate as secondary writers, philosophers or sociologists rather than historians. They use the work of historians at second hand, themselves having little or no experience of the problems of historical research, using primary sources.

### Mode of Production

If one is to consider the most important aspects of the application of theories of historical materialism to the practice of historical research and writing, it seems to me that the most useful starting-point would be to examine the main thrust of the anti-Marxists rather than the internal contortions of some of the Marxist theorists. There are many differing strands of the criticism of Marxist theories of history but at the moment I only want to consider two. First, the concept of the mode of production is much criticized, as is inevitable given its central importance for historical materialism. Second and perhaps more frequently, that essential feature of the mode of production concept, social class and class conflict, is frequently under attack.

The mode of production concept can be badly applied, both by practising historians and especially by theorists who are not such. Among

the most obvious of the faulty uses of the concept is an assumption of a one-way determination by the economic base of all other aspects of a particular mode, on an even narrower form of technological determinism. Engels, towards the end of his life, took care to distance himself from this use of Marxism. Other distortions at the opposite end of the scale include an over-emphasis on class conflict at the expense of economic factors. In fact, these misuses of the mode of production concept tend not to be made by working historians, but rather by the sort of theorists I have referred to who do not engage in the application of theory to practice.<sup>1</sup> When the working historian finds that theory, as he/she applies it, does not explain the facts, it is the theory which has to be critically scrutinized.

Marxists, as well as their critics, can pick out and reject distortions of the mode of production concept. But critics of Marxism also attack what they regard as the 'holism' implied by historical materialism and by the mode of production concept in particular. Their target is not so much forms of rigid determinism as the idea that there is an interdependence of the different aspects of a social formation—economic base, class relations of production, legal, political and ideological superstructures. The working Marxist historian is careful not to assume one-way determination within the complexities of a social formation based on a mode of production, but does assume interconnections. And in insisting on these interconnections he/she, as a materialist, will give long-term priority to the material foundations of social class relations.

To come down to brass tacks, as a medievalist, I think that it is essential to recognize 'feudalism' as a mode of production, even though it may be prudent to accept its European specificity. This specificity is implied in the borrowing of the term 'feudal', derived from a particular European medieval institution, the 'fief', as broadly definitive of the mode. I do not think that a full understanding of medieval society is possible without this concept, not to speak of the by no means exhausted investigation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. My main aim in this paper is to consider a particular aspect of medieval society which I think has been badly distorted by some non-Marxist historians. But I will first briefly outline my own understanding of the feudal mode of production in its socio-economic aspects, without entering into detail concerning so-called super-structural aspects.

### Feudal Society

The idea that medieval technology was at a low level and almost static has fairly frequently been challenged over the years. The use of water

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read to the *Back to the Future* conference, organized in 1988 by Lawrence and Wishart to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of A.L. Morton's *People's History of England*. It will appear in R. Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, revised edn., Verso 1990.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed this in my introduction to *The Branner Debate. Agrarian Class Structures and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, eds. T.H. Aston and C.H.P. Philpin, 1985.

and wind power for corn-grinding and fulling mills is quite rightly emphasized—sometimes, perhaps, over-emphasized.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the use of power-driven machinery was not sufficiently developed to alter the fact that the basic units of production in both town and country were almost all so small that the labour force which worked them was based on the family, whether nuclear or three-generational.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, though by no means all, the family labour force would be strengthened by the addition of one or two—seldom more—hired workers. In the case of the holdings of middling or richer peasants, there might be young members of other, perhaps related, families, with the seasonal addition of smallholders whose holdings were insufficient for self-subsistence, and, at harvest time, itinerant men and women from towns.<sup>4</sup> In the towns the analogous unit of production was the artisan workshop, also with a family labour force. The traditional picture is of the addition of an apprentice, often from outside the town, and of a journeyman who had finished his apprenticeship but not yet acquired sufficient resources to own his own workshop. In fact, the situation was probably more fluid, the line between poor masters and journeymen often being blurred and the prospects for journeymen becoming masters very slim.<sup>5</sup>

Peasants, smallholders, artisans and journeymen constituted the core of the working population in the feudal mode of production, though we must not ignore the large, though badly documented, numbers of unskilled workers and marginal people, especially in the bigger towns. The dominant class which lived off the rents in labour, kind and money of the peasant producers was as differentiated socially as was the peasantry, ranging from the big baronial and ecclesiastical landowners to the lesser gentry. All, however, mainly through the jurisdictional power which they exercised over their tenants and dwellers on their estates, were transferring, in various forms, the surplus product of peasant labour beyond the peasants' subsistence and reproduction needs, by means of non-economic coercion. Whatever elements of bargaining there might be as to rent levels, reflecting changes in the landlord/peasant balance of power, peasant rent was not, basically, 'economic' and was the major element in landlord income. The pretence that the traditional manorial demesnes (or home farms) or the new Cistercian granges foreshadowed capitalist enterprises cannot be sustained. Seigneurial power was as much the force behind hired labour on the demesnes or the labour of the lay brethren on the granges as it was behind labour services as part of rent.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See R.A. Holt, *The Mills of Medieval England*, 1988. A.R. Bridbury in *Medieval English Clothmaking*, 1982, throws doubt on conventional emphases on the importance of the fulling mill. The contributors to *The Countryside of Medieval England*, eds. G. Astill and A. Grant, 1988, tend to stress the static character of medieval technology.

<sup>3</sup> In many medieval peasant and artisan households the two generation family, in the normal cycle of family history, could from time to time be a three generation family—that is, with grandparents living alongside their children and grandchildren.

<sup>4</sup> See S.A. Penn, 'Female Wage Labour in Late 14th-Century England', *Agricultural History Review*, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> A point made many years ago by E. Coornaert in *Les Corporations en France avant 1789*, 1941. See also G. Unwin, *Industrial Organisation*, 1904.

<sup>6</sup> The illusion that Cistercian granges worked by *convers* somehow anticipated capitalist enterprise has been well exposed by Isabel Alfonso in a forthcoming article.

The feudal mode of production was not a natural economy. In the countryside as well as in the towns petty commodity production was established very early, in some places perhaps as early as pre-history. Naturally, it did not dominate production, or production relations, in the countryside as it did in the towns. Nevertheless, peasants had to acquire money, either to buy manufactured commodities or to pay rent or tax. Even though they were able to provide their own subsistence, they still had to go to the market to sell their surplus produce and get a small money income—or to sell to itinerant corn or stock-mongers who then went to the market. As suggested, some peasant money income might be spent on necessary manufactured commodities, or on essentials such as salt which could not be acquired except through the market. But the bulk of their money income went either to the landlord in rent or to the feudal state through taxation. This ruling class and state money income was spent to a large extent on luxury commodities (wines, spices, silks...) or on war (arms, armour, castles, mercenaries). Most of these commodities were the major components of international or long-distance trade and were handled by merchants, the dominating elements in the ruling elites of the bigger towns. The relationship between these merchant capitalists and the feudal landowners was by no means that of class antagonists, although there might be jurisdictional disputes, as between feudal lords themselves. The feudal state and the feudal lords, moreover, depended on merchant capitalists, not only for the goods of long-distance trade but also for money loans. In one way or another, merchant capitalists, of whatever creed, were usurers.

### Urban Popular Grievances

How do the artisans and those lower down the social scale in the towns fit into this description of the feudal mode of production? Was a surplus analogous to rent appropriated from the middling and lower urban classes? Rent certainly had to be paid to urban landowners but did not constitute a significant element in the incomes of the ruling urban elites. Insofar as artisans had grievances it could, for example, be because of the exploitation by merchant putters-out, who provided the raw material (mainly for cloth production) and sold the finished product. Conflicts in medieval Flemish and Italian towns, especially in the fourteenth century, reflect this situation. But, as many historians point out, the principal grievance of the artisans and those below them was taxation—a grievance expressed in bitter complaints to state authorities and very often in revolt.

Many non-Marxist historians admit the class element in peasant movements against landlords as well as the rationality of their complaints against rents and such servile dues as marriage fines, death duties and arbitrary tallage. In this perception they are probably influenced by Marc Bloch, who said that peasant revolts were as inevitable in seigneurial society as strikes in large-scale capitalist enterprise.<sup>7</sup> But when we consider rebellion among the lower classes of the medieval town, a very different attitude appears. Class

---

<sup>7</sup> *Caractères originaux de l'économie rurale française*, 1981, p. 175.

divisions are either denied or regarded as minimal. Discontent and revolt are dismissed as irrational. S. Reynolds, in her survey of medieval English towns, believes that 'people did not feel all the class antagonisms that we may think their rational interests required', they had 'faith in consensus and reconciliation'. P. Wolff, in his important study of social movements in the towns of Languedoc, denies class conflict on the grounds that there were 'rich and poor within each social group'. J. Lestocquoy, many years ago, suggested that the anti-patrician movements in the Flemish towns were due to ambitious agitators. Rossiaud more recently says that urban revolts were irrational violence provoked by rumour and usually manipulated from above. Chevalier tells us that popular violence was due to the emotions of the poor... no class conflict, no reforming ideas, just anger that the rich were not doing their social duty.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, these and other historians insist on taxation as the main reason for complaint and revolt. Here, as we will see, we seem to be going 'back to the future'. The townspeople did not oppose taxation as such. They accepted the monarchical state and in time of war—most of the fourteenth century—they knew that troops and equipment had to be paid for. This was especially the case in France, where marauding invaders and bandit-like mercenaries were part of the everyday landscape. But they were well aware that the way in which taxes were levied by the mercantile oligarchies was both unfair and corrupt. They had a rational, even sophisticated perception of the different forms of taxation. P. Wolff, in the work mentioned above, shows that the artisans in towns in the south of France were explicitly hostile to poll taxes and to indirect taxes on consumables. They demanded that taxes be levied which were proportional to wealth, whereas the urban elites preferred the poll tax and the indirect tax. The artisans' view would seem to us to be not only reasonable but more perceptive than those of many people today. It is likely that they regarded the oligarchies' manipulation of the tax system much as the peasants regarded demands for ever more rents and services—as another form of non-economic and coercive appropriation of their earnings in return for nothing.

Before moving on to examples of revolt against tax, it would be useful to examine some objective evidence of urban taxation—objective in the sense that it does not simply emerge as the content of complaints against the tax. Such figures are not easy to obtain, given the erratic survival of urban records. A unique calculation has been made by A. Rigaudière from the financial records of the medium-sized town of St. Flour in the Auvergne, a town at the centre of the Tuchin revolts of the late fourteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The records used go from 1378 to 1465.

---

<sup>8</sup> S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of Medieval English Towns*, 1977. Conflict is well documented in this work. See p. 185 for her refusal to accept the existence of conflicting classes in medieval towns. See also P. Wolff, 'Les luttes sociales dans le Midi français' *Annales* 130, 1947; J. Lestocquoy, *Les Villes de Flandre et de l'Italie sous le gouvernement des patriciens*, 1952, pp. 79–85; J. Rossiaud in *Histoire de La France urbaine*, ed. G. Duby, II, *La Ville médiévale*, 1980, pp. 519–24; B. Chevalier, *Les Bonnes Villes de La France*, 1982, pp. 299–302.

<sup>9</sup> St-Flour, *Ville d'Auvergne au bas moyen âge*, 1982.

Most of the urban income was derived from tax and most of it was spent on defence. Half of the total income came from an indirect tax on consumables. Only 30 per cent came from a direct tax on property, which could have been proportional to wealth, except that town houses, gardens and mills, most belonging to the rich, got a 50 per cent abatement, which artisans' workshops did not get. Furthermore, the capital value of pious endowments, pensions for clergy and relatives and alms was deducted from the assessments. This naturally benefited the rich, so that some of them paid no tax at all—not to speak of total tax exemption for the clergy, the nobility and officials, because of their status.

### Corruption and Revolt

Most of the anti-tax rebellions resulted more from obvious examples of corruption than from the awareness—which existed—of the unfairness of the system, since the latter was a permanent feature of life. These rebellions go back well beyond the crisis years of the late fourteenth century. In London, in the mid-1190s, a rebellion provoked by the tax-avoidance of the rich was led by William Fitzosbert, possibly a member of a well-to-do family. He and nine other rebels were hanged. Unfortunately, we have only a chronicler's report which gives no details of the tax-fiddling. Complaints in London recur. For example, elements among its middling citizens complained that the rich were buying tax exemptions from the Crown and shifting the burden on to the poor. A decade earlier, in 1265, Lincoln citizens had been protesting because the rich paid no tax and appropriated market tolls for themselves. In 1306, as a result of a judicial enquiry at York, we have some details of a very elaborate tax fiddle. A caucus within the ruling council, including the mayor, set up a religious fraternity for bogus charitable purposes. They swore oaths to support each other, even against members of their own families, in law suits. They also arranged that they would control tax assessments in order to make sure that they paid nothing or only minimal quantities. On the other hand, they agreed that artisans should pay a weekly tax on their earnings. The enquiry resulted in their temporary suspension from citizenship, but within a few years they were reinstated and some of them once again obtained leading offices, such as the mayoralty.<sup>20</sup>

There are many other instances in medieval English towns of the exploitation of the tax system by the merchant oligarchies. Serious rebellions against taxation were even more frequent in France, where the tax burden was much heavier. I give a few examples. At Arras, in the north-east, in the 1280s, complaints against the diversion of the heavy burden on to the people for the benefit of the ruling elite led to the imprisonment of one of the complainants. Renewed protests led to the formation of a body which was supposed to control the town's finances, but the tax evasions of the rich continued over the years until 1355 when a riot followed a heavy tax imposition, resulting in the

<sup>20</sup> C.N.L. Brooke and G. Keir, *London 800-1216, the Shaping of a City*, 1975; G.A. Williams, *Medieval London from Commons to Capital*, 1963; J.W.F. Hill, *Medieval Lincoln*, 1948; G.O. Sayles, 'Dissolution of a Guild at York', *English Historical Review*, 1940.

defenestration of some of the prominent oligarchs. In the town of Provins, famous for its fairs and textile production, heavy taxation in 1281 caused an artisan rising in which the mayor was killed. In 1324, the majority of the population voted for the abolition of the merchant-dominated commune in favour of direct royal control, because of fiscal oppression by the mayor and the échevins. All over France, similar protests and rebellions took place, culminating in the 1380s in revolts in Paris and twenty-six other French towns—and repeated again later.<sup>11</sup>

These tax rebellions in France were taking place at the same time as the English rising of 1381. The English rebels had many grievances and many claims, most arising from specific issues of landlord/peasant relationships. But it was the third of a series of poll taxes which triggered off the rebellion and brought urban populations into supporting the rebels as far north as York, Beverley and Scarborough.<sup>12</sup>

Urban discontent was not confined to the issue of taxation. In the fourteenth century, especially in London, discontented journeymen were forming 'covins' among themselves to support demands for higher wages and continued to do so, sometimes in the guise of religious fraternities, well into the fifteenth century, in Coventry as well as in London. Similar movements are found in Paris and other French towns, often over hours of work. But whatever the significance of these early manifestations of discontent among wage-workers, the tax issue predominated and the journeymen followed the lead of the master artisans, in spite of the conflicts with them over wages and hours of work. It is clear, too, that tax rebellions were supported by the unskilled and marginal elements of the population—the urban poor who were seriously affected by the indirect taxes on food and drink which the rich, for obvious reasons, preferred. It is possible that the involvement of the marginals gives some colour to certain depictions of urban revolt as irrational hostility by the poor to the rich. This superficial dismissal of protest against genuine grievances does not stand up if one engages in a detailed class analysis of the medieval town.

The master artisans, including the well-to-do ones, were generally excluded from the political processes of urban government and were well aware of the tax manipulation by those who controlled the ruling councils. Their exclusion meant that in many cases their rational and justified opposition could only be expressed in protests which inevitably led to violence.<sup>13</sup> The same remarks can be made about rebellious journeymen and the discontented and marginalized poor. Their class position made them even more vulnerable than the master artisans, especially in face of the high cost of living resulting from the

---

<sup>11</sup> L. Mirot, *Les insurrections urbaines au début du règne de Charles VI, 1380-3: leurs causes, leurs conséquences*, 1906.

<sup>12</sup> *The English Rising of 1381*, eds. R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston, 1984.

<sup>13</sup> Medieval records, especially judicial, make it clear that violence was also very much part of the life-style of the medieval ruling class. See, for instance, J. Bellamy, *Crime and Disorder in England in the Later Middle Ages*, 1973.

predominance of indirect, and consequently regressive, taxation. Their grievances and their forms of rebellion were as much to be expected in feudal society as were the revolts of peasants. However much they frightened the chroniclers and others who denigrated them, the historians who closely examine the facts can give them credit for rationality.

## NEW FROM I.B. TAURIS

### The Second Socialist Revolution

*Tatyana Zaslavskaya*

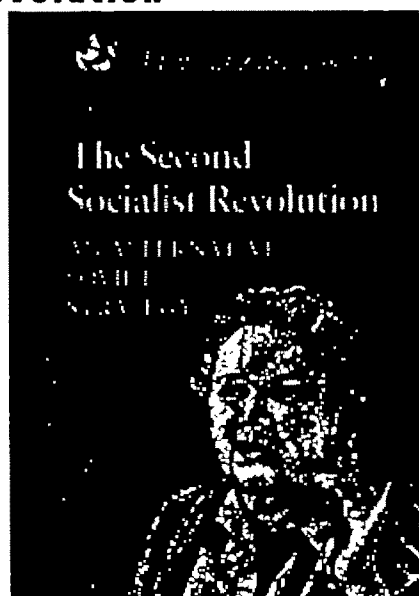
Tatyana Zaslavskaya is a radical sociologist and academician recently elected to the Congress of People's Deputies.

In *The Second Socialist Revolution*, Zaslavskaya considers the current economic and political climate in the Soviet Union. Tracing the development of perestroika and its impact on the people of the USSR, she warns of the social consequences of economic change.

1 85403 151 5 [Cased]

£19.95

I.B. Tauris & Co, 110 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1 8JA. Tel: 01 483 2681





# New in Cultural Politics

## **Displacing Homophobia** Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture *Ronald R. Butters, John M. Clum,* and *Michael Moon*, editors

The editors have gathered essays that not only make a major contribution to the effort to replace homophobic discourse, but also speak persuasively to all readers interested in literary history, contemporary theory and popular culture.

Duke University Press  
315 pages, £14.20 paper

## **The Telephone Book** Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech *Avital Ronell*

A meditation on the technically constituted state, this book opens a new field, becoming the first political deconstruction of technology, state terrorism, and schizophrenia.

University of Nebraska Press  
426 pages, £33.25 cloth

## **The Rhetoric of Interpretation and the Interpretation of Rhetoric** *Paul Hernadi*, editor

An important collection of essays from eminent scholars - Terry Eagleton, Jonathan Culler, Martin Jay, Michael Holquist and others - discussing the interrelatedness of rhetoric, interpretation and contemporary critiques of ideology.

Duke University Press  
288 pages, £13.25 paper

## **Postmodernism and Japan**

*Masao Miyoshi* and  
*H.D. Harootunian*, editors

This is a coherent yet diverse study of the dynamics of postmodernism - as described by Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari - from the unique view of a society in transition, confronting the problems induced by the introduction of new forms of knowledge, modes of production, and social relations.

Duke University Press  
328 pages, £13.25 paper

## **Detachment**

*Michel Serres*  
Introduction by *René Girard*

This volume from the eminent French philosopher, Michel Serres, consists of four essays which look at the organization of culture, the birth of knowledge, the survival of the species, and the slave-master relationship.

Ohio University Press  
115 pages, £18.95 cloth

## **Community Without Unity** A Politics of Derridian Extravagance *William Corlett*

An examination of the way political theories of community work, distinguishing their substantive content from what they actually do. Corlett demonstrates they are trapped between the principle of remunity and the principle of communion.

Duke University Press  
224 pages, £35.65 cloth

**Academic and University Publishers Group**  
1 Gower Street London WC1E 6HA

# **theory, culture & society**

**...the book series**  
series editor **Mike Featherstone**

## **REPRODUCTION IN EDUCATION, SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

**Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron**

The authors of this classic text (now reissued with a new introduction by Pierre Bourdieu) show how the reproduction of culture through education plays a key part in the reproduction of the whole social system.

July 1990 ■ 288 pp ■ Cloth (8039-8319-0) £25.00 ■ Paper (8039-8320-4) £10.95

## **GLOBAL CULTURE**

Edited by **Mike Featherstone**

In this book, leading social scientists offer differing explanations for the trends towards a globalization of culture and their relation to an economic world-system. They explore the emergence of 'third cultures', such as the financial markets and media conglomerates, as elements which transcend the boundaries of the nation state

June 1990 ■ 384 pp ■ Cloth (8039-8321-2) £27.50 ■ Paper (8039-8322-0) £11.95

## **THE TOURIST GAZE**

**John Urry**

The *Tourist Gaze* suggests that there are systematic ways of 'seeing' what we as tourists look at. The author argues that we are seeing a universalization of the tourist gaze and increasing confusion between 'tourism' as it is conventionally understood and a host of other social practices - shopping, sport, culture, hobbies, leisure and education.

September 1990 ■ 192 pp ■ Cloth (8039-8182-1) £25.00 ■ Paper (8039-8183-X) £9.95

## **THEORIS OF MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY**

Edited by **Bryan S Turner**

The contributors to this timely volume trace arguments over modernism and its aftermath to their origins in art, architecture and literature. They contrast Habermas's version of modernist rationality with the theoretical work of Lyotard and Baudrillard and explore the theme of nostalgia as a response to modernization. The implications of the postmodernism debate for politics, citizenship, the status of women and social change are also explored.

September 1990 ■ 224 pp ■ Cloth (8039-8370-0) £25.00 ■ Paper (8039-8371-9) £9.95

**SAGE Publications Ltd. 28 Banner Street, London EC1Y 8QE, UK**

*comment*

Elizabeth Wilson

## The Postmodern Chameleon

I am writing in response to Sabina Lovibond's article 'Feminism and Postmodernism', in *New Left Review* Number 178, in which I am pigeonholed as an apologist for or advocate of anti-Enlightenment philosophy. I now believe that the case I tried to state in favour of adornment in dress in *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* could have been more clearly put, and that it was unfortunate that I had almost finished writing the book before I became aware of the debate on postmodernism. As someone who still finds Marxism highly relevant in the present world, I absolutely reject, however, any attempt to align me with the likes of Rorty et al.

In *Adorned in Dreams* I tried to develop a critique of 'rational dress', in part by suggesting that some of its premisses were actually irrational, my particular objections being to its biologism and utilitarianism. I was critical of contemporary feminist attitudes to adornment, not because of their attempt to challenge sexist stereotypes of womanhood, but because the implicit beliefs upon which they were based seemed to me to subscribe, in part at least, to mistaken views about the cultural significance of dress. It is as if some feminists felt that you could escape fashion (changing styles) and style itself, and that to care about your appearance was necessarily to be cast into a fallen state of false consciousness. (Paradoxically, of course, feminists who advocated particular forms of clothing themselves cared deeply about their appearance.) My view, by contrast, was that dress transmits a variety of complex cultural meanings and that it is therefore impossible simply to opt out, as some feminists seem to have hoped to do. There were also very strong moralistic prescriptions in the way in which some feminists in the 1970s discussed dress; for example, for some it was always an indication of 'incorrect attitudes' to dress in a 'sexual' way. With the reaction against such attitudes in full swing in the 1980s, they perhaps seem less oppressive than they did in the 1970s, but I feel that Sabina Lovibond seriously understates the problem when she speaks of the 'occasional moralism or "moral elitism" of radical movements' as 'a vice of excess'. To read Boris Kagarlitsky on 'The Soviet Crisis' in the same issue of *New Left Review* immediately after 'Feminism and Postmodernism' is to be made aware of just where these 'vices of excess' can lead.

## Adornment and Pleasure

Sabina Lovibond castigates me for aligning adornment with pleasure. She misrepresents me, however, if she believes that I was simply arguing for a 'celebration' of fashion hedonism. Like many others, I was suggesting that it is useful to investigate the sources of pleasure rather than merely condemning them. The question of pleasure has important ideological implications, and is surely a legitimate focus of investigation, which feminists have studied in many different areas, perhaps most importantly using psychoanalytic theory. To attempt to excavate the sources of pleasure in popular culture is not necessarily either to endorse or condemn. In any case, the aesthetic and moral value of various kinds of popular cultural product surely diverges considerably.

I am not making the same argument as that advanced by Brenda Polan, as quoted in 'Feminism and Postmodernism', and in fact I don't think her argument is quite right. Yet Sabina Lovibond's argument in this passage is itself odd, when she equates 'pleasure' with 'staving off boredom or sadness'. This is a peculiar and irrational leap. No doubt women and men do from time to time use shopping for this purpose, but that was not what I had in mind in discussing the pleasure to be derived from dress. Many women and some men (and both sexes much more equally in many non-Western cultures) show tremendous creativity in their adornment of the body, whether with fabric, paint, metal, beads, embroidery or many other forms of adornment. It is quite possible to be critical of the specific form that *consumerism* takes in capitalist societies and at the same time to defend the practice of bodily adornment. Why should the body not be a bearer of cultural signs? Can it ever not be? In fact, as I suggested earlier, the feminists of the 1970s and 1980s themselves transmitted a very specific cultural message *within* the parameters of contemporary styles, using punk, hippie and other countercultural motifs and bricolage—thoroughly postmodern, in other words.

The feminist search for a styleless style and the rejection of adornment does, though, align feminist attempts to reform—or revolutionize—dress with proponents of modernism such as Adolf Loos (author of 'Ornament as Crime'), and Bauhaus architects who believed that the functionalism of their buildings transcended fashion and therefore change, achieving universal relevance. I find much modernist architecture inspiring and beautiful, yet it wasn't, surely, correct to see it as timeless and universal. Indeed, part of its charm today is its period feel. In other words, our responses to different aspects of different aesthetic and cultural movements vary and one of the more disheartening aspects of the modernism/postmodernism debate has been the attempt to align all sorts of different practices along a single continuum. Do all Marxists admire all modernist architecture? Do all postmodernists enjoy *Dallas* and MTV?

In *Adorned in Dreams* I never undertook a defence or celebration of anything, and certainly not of 'anything-goes' postmodernism, as Sabina Lovibond would be aware, had she read my more recent essays

on postmodernism in *Hallucinations*.<sup>1</sup> Like many other writers, I find the concept of Postmodernism useful as a description of how the contemporary world actually feels a lot of the time. Some of the foremost pro-postmodernists reject precisely the idea that postmodernism is just a description of a 'zeitgeist'; nevertheless, to me that is its main attraction. At the same time, the political implications to be drawn from most postmodernist positions seem to me to be profoundly 'reactionary'—if that is still a meaningful term.

Yet postmodernism is itself not a single unified entity. Perhaps in time we shall come to see the period we are now living through as one of transition or intensified struggle, when new forms were seeking to burst through from the old—rather like the aestheticism, 'decadence' and *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere of the 90s, with which the decade on which we are just embarked is already being compared. I have argued elsewhere that the 'decadence' of the 1890s was part of just such a struggle to find new ways of understanding and expression.<sup>2</sup> It wasn't a terminus, and no more will the anti-historicism and entropy of postmodernism be.

To be so dismissive of it is therefore perhaps to take it too much on its own terms. At the same time, although I am rather sceptical of the claims made by Angela McRobbie, Andreas Huyssen and Craig Owens that postmodernism permits the stronger emergence of various marginal Others, previously oppressed by Marxism, into the political mainstream, Sabina Lovibond should perhaps have acknowledged the existence of this line of argument.<sup>3</sup> As it is, by singling out particularly conservative and crypto-rightwing inflections of postmodernism, her argument evades the ambiguous attractiveness of postmodernism, and becomes rather reductionist, ignoring on the one hand its populist movement (as in architecture) and the left rhetoric that seeks to place it in a different light. As expounded by her, it is incomprehensible why anyone who counts himself as on the left should ever take postmodernism seriously.

Recently on the BBC-2 'Newsnight' programme (8 January 1990) Martin Jacques, editor of *Marxism Today*, described Mikhail Gorbachev as a radical because 'he has thrown everything up in the air'. This definition of radicalism as juggling is a rather novel one and begs many questions, not least what happens when 'something'—the economy perhaps—falls to the ground again. Politics as showmanship, sleight of hand and performance is, however, as much part of postmodern radicalism as the 'parochial civility' Sabina Lovibond rightly rejects. 'Feminism and Postmodernism', although forceful within its limits as a critique of a particular group of

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Hallucinations*, London 1988

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, 'Forbidden Love', *New Statesman and Society*, 10 November 1989

<sup>3</sup> See Angela McRobbie, 'Postmodernism and Popular Culture', in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: A Documents*, London 1989, Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', in Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism*, London 1986; Craig Owens, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism', in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Port Townsend, Washington 1983.

philosophers, would have been stronger had Sabina Lovibond acknowledged the chameleon-like ability of postmodernism to appeal to a wide range of political positions. This is as important for feminism as for the Left.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Sabina Lovibond replies:* Perhaps I should have confined myself more strictly to the 'specific bit of textual exploration' which I announced at the beginning of my paper. I ventured further afield out of a sense of alarm at the growing tendency for postmodernist views of subjectivity to be deployed, not just against vanguardism on the left, but against any kind of conscious resistance to patriarchal or capitalist normality in everyday life. And I mentioned Elizabeth Wilson because her work on fashion has seemed to me to give comfort, over the last few years, to people with a vested interest in female consumerism. I did not go so far as to say that Elizabeth Wilson countenanced this application of her ideas, and it is good to be told explicitly that she does not.

Radical movements are nothing without their charge of anger against large-scale structures of oppression. But on the other hand, this diffuse kind of anger also creates an ever-present potential for moral terrorism or fundamentalism. Feminism shares in this tension; and I suppose Elizabeth Wilson and I find ourselves pulling opposite ways with respect to it. To me at any rate the righteousness of the 70s seems remote indeed: analysis and abstraction are surely the endangered species now, and it is the capacity to stand back from socially endorsed forms of pleasure that is at risk of being undervalued. Similarly, I didn't think readers of NLR would still need me to tell them that they had better take postmodernism seriously.

I'd like to record that I find much to agree with in the theoretical argument of *Adorned in Dreams* (especially as regards the impossibility of a 'style-free style'), and also in the essay on 'Utopian Identities' in Elizabeth Wilson's more recent *Hallucinations*.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity of completing the reference in footnote 22 of my article to *The Critique of Pure Reason*: A648/B676.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thanks are due to Macmillan (Educational) for permission to reprint Sabina Lovibond's article 'Feminism and Postmodernism', which will appear later this year in *Postmodernism and Society*, edited by Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi.

## Nicaragua: What went wrong?

by Mike Gonzalez

The first to reassess Nicaragua in the wake of the Sandinistas' election defeat, this book traces the road from the mass insurrection of 1979 to the defeat of 1990, identifying the crucial weaknesses in Sandinista strategy, and arguing that this setback confirms rather than negates the significance of the 1979 revolution. £4.50 / US\$7.50

## Is southern Ireland a neo-colony?

by Kieran Allen

The central argument of Sinn Féin in their bid for votes in the south of Ireland is that the 'free state' is not free at all—but a 'neo-colony' of Britain. Marshalling a wealth of economic facts, Kieran Allen reveals the fatal flaws in the Sinn Féin position. (Published by Bookmarks Dublin). £1.50 / US\$2.50

## Shelley's revolutionary year

edited and with an introduction by Paul Foot

The events at Peterloo, in 1819, when the Manchester yeomanry hacked their way through an unarmed crowd, killing eleven people and injuring many more, spurred the poet Shelley to the most creative months of his life. This is the 'small volume' of political poems and prose that he tried to get published just before he died—now published here for the first time. (A RedWords publication). £3.95 / US\$6.50

## The Eastern bloc: The storm breaks

The Spring 1990 issue of *International Socialism* Journal, number 2:46, includes a special book-length article arguing against the current pessimism on the left over the seemingly headlong rush of the new regimes to embrace the Western-style markets. Plus an analysis of the changing balance in South Africa, between De Klerk and Mandela. £2.50 / US\$4.00

All titles are available from good bookshops; also by mail order (please add 60p / \$1.00 per title for postage) from:

### Bookmarks London

265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE, England. Phone 01-802 6145.

### Bookmarks Chicago

PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616, USA. Phone 312-666-7337.



NEW  
TITLES  
Spring  
1990

# NEW FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

## Thinking Fragments

Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West

Jane Flax

"Even better than I thought it would be. There are few scholars—if any—who could bring such a comprehensive, rich, and both appreciative and critical perspective to psychoanalysis, feminist theory and postmodernist philosophy."—Sandra Harding,

University of Delaware

"Helps to bridge the gap between postmodern and feminist theory, a gap which is largely the result of male theorists' failing to pay attention to feminist currents."—Christine Di Stefano,

University of Washington

\$25.00 cloth (U.S.)

## Hard Core

Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"

Linda Williams

"Complex and brilliant....This book is so suavely well written that it's hard to put down."

—ALA Booklist

"Though deeply engaged in the issues raised by the porn debate, it is in no sense a polemic...provocative and entertaining."—*Women's Review of Books*

\$18.95 cloth (U.S.)

## The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe

Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century

Daniel Chirot, ed.

Reaching back centuries, this study makes a convincing case for very deep roots of current Eastern European backwardness. Like the rest of the world except for that unique part of the West which has given us a false model of what was "normal," Eastern Europe developed slowly. One of this book's most important lessons is that while economics may limit the freedom of action of political players, it does not determine political outcomes.

\$40.00 cloth (U.S.)

## Whose Keeper?

Social Science and Moral Obligation

Alan Wolfe

"Wolfe's provocative survey of the breakdown of civil society spares neither right-wing champions of 'economic freedom' nor left-liberal advocates of an expanded welfare state."—*The Washington Post*

"By showing that the social sciences provide the operative moral philosophies of modern societies, Wolfe gives us a new understanding of the fundamental predicaments of modernity."

—Robert Bellah, co-author of *Habits of the Heart*  
\$25.00 cloth (U.S.)

## The Social Importance of Self-Esteem

Andrew M. Mecca, Neil J. Smelser, and John Vasconcellos, eds.

Is the well-being of a society dependent on the well-being of its citizenry? Does individual self-esteem play a causal role in chronic social problems? In an attempt to answer these questions, the State of California established a task force on self-esteem and social responsibility to determine what connections might exist between these two factors.

\$11.95 paper, \$40.00 cloth (U.S.)

## Social Change and Modernity

Hans Haferkamp and Neil J. Smelser, eds.

In this wide-ranging, eclectic collection examining new directions in the study of social dynamics, both in Europe and in the United States, an eclectic and renowned group of authors explore new models of social change, including the controversial idea of autopoiesis (self-regulation of society), feminism, the anti-nuclear movement, and environmental politics.

\$49.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper (U.S.)

University of  
California Press

Berkeley 94720



181 *new left review*

## **SOVIET CLASS STRUGGLES**

Benedict Anderson

**Murder in Thailand**

Theodore Friedgut/  
Lewis Siegelbaum

**Moscow and the Miners' Challenge**

Harmke Kamminga

**Understanding Chaos**

Mjoset-Fagerberg/  
Cappelen-Skarstein

**The Norwegian Model?**

Barbara Fields

**Racism in America**

**Colin Leys** on the Analysis of Thatcherism

1		<i>Themes</i>
5	<i>Theodore Friedgut/ Lewis Siegelbaum</i>	Perestroika from Below: The Soviet Miners' Strike and its Aftermath
33	<i>Benedict Anderson</i>	Murder and Progress in Modern Siam
49	<i>Harmke Kamminga</i>	What is This Thing Called Chaos?
60	<i>Jan Fagerberg/Ådne Cappelen/ Lars Mjølset/Rune Skarstein</i>	The Decline of Social-Democratic State Capitalism in Norway
95	<i>Barbara Jeanne Fields</i>	Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America
119	<i>Colin Leys</i>	COMMENT Still a Question of Hegemony

<i>Editor</i>	Robin Blackburn
<i>Editorial Committee</i>	Patrick Camiller, Alexander Cockburn, Mike Davis, Peter Dews, Diane Elson, Norman Geras, Quentin Hoare, Oliver MacDonald, Benita Magal, Ellen Meiksins Wood
<i>Associate Editors</i>	Perry Anderson, Tariq Ali

---

<i>Editorial communications</i>	New Left Review, 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR
<i>Subscription correspondence</i>	New Left Review, 120-126 Lavender Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HP
<i>Business Manager</i>	Robin Gable
<i>Advertising Manager</i>	Arthur Boyars
<i>American Distributor</i>	B. de Boer, 113 East Center Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA

---

<i>NLR Prices</i>	<i>Individual subscription:</i>	<i>Institutional subscription:</i>
<i>Inland (UK/Eire):</i>	£17	£33
<i>Europe (air) &amp; Rest of World (ASP):</i>	£21 or US\$33	£37 or US\$58
<i>USA &amp; Canada (Airmail):</i>	£21 or US\$33 or Can\$40	£37 or US\$58
<i>Airmail overseas:</i>	£29 or US\$45 or Can\$55	£45 or US\$70

MICROFICHE SETS 1-178 (1960-1989), incl. cumulated index £350 (inland), £365/US\$600 (overseas)

INDEX 1-178 (1960-1989): *Inland*: £28 (cloth), £13 (paper) *Overseas*: £31/US\$50 (cloth), £15/US\$24 (paper)

New Left Review (ISSN 0028-6060) is published bi-monthly by New Left Review Ltd, 6 Meard St., London W1V 3HR, UK. Annual subscription price in the USA and Canada is US\$33 for individuals, US\$58 for institutions, including airspeed delivery. Second-class postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. USA POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to New Left Review, Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Printed in Great Britain.

In NLR 179 R.W. Davies pointed out that the future of the Soviet Union would be settled as much by the clash of social forces as by the rival programmes of economic advisers. In the turmoil now engulfing Soviet society the working class, predominantly Russian by ethnic composition, has become a major protagonist in the unfolding political drama. In this issue of the Review Theodore Friedgut and Lewis Siegelbaum give a vivid and well-documented account of a decisive episode in the historic reawakening of the Soviet proletariat—the miners' strike in July 1989 and its continuing reverberations in succeeding months. While the miners were spurred to action by tangible material problems, they soon put forward political demands—the Vorkuta miners were among the first publicly to insist on abolition of Article Six of the Soviet Constitution, enshrining the 'leading role' of the Party. In the aftermath of the strike many of the miners' committees remained in being, fostering the spread of independent trade-union activity.

Fear of working-class reaction has played a significant part in the economic-policy vacillations of the Soviet government. In the present critical conjuncture the railworkers, the oil workers and the miners all have great social power. But as Friedgut and Siegelbaum make clear, while Soviet workers are acquiring a new collective self-confidence, their economic proposals so far have taken a highly specific form. On the one hand they insist that urgent needs are attended to, but on the other they are attracted by the idea of direct appropriation of the revenue arising from their work. Thus Soviet miners and oil workers have demanded payment in hard currency for the coal or oil they produce. Some versions of the workers' demands could be compatible with a socialized self-management system, and the new socialist current has picked up support in the mining districts. But the workers' demands could also be given a sectionalist twist, creating new types of corporate privilege. As the authors remind us, these groups of workers are thought to be already favoured by prevailing wage scales, so their demands do not necessarily promote a generalized class consciousness. Yeltsin has supported the workers' demands for hard currency as necessary for Russian development and as a battering ram which will open up the economy to market

forces. Social struggles cannot be relied upon to have a spontaneously socialist character in the Soviet social formation any more than in the West. Yet these social struggles furnish a powerful and necessary check on the abstractions of the economists and the manoeuvres of the new breed of Soviet parliamentarian. As new groups enter political life the possibility develops of elaborating a new conception of the general interest.

The collapse of the Communist alternative is bound to arouse new interest in the prospects for social democracy. This is especially likely to be the case in Europe where moderate left parties now have lively hopes of making electoral gains. Our occasional series on the formations of the Left in Europe acquires a new significance as a widening of the Community is debated and left parties work for a majority within it. In this issue Lars Mjøset and his co-authors explore the record of Norwegian social democracy. Their conclusion is not a reassuring one since they find that many of the historic supports for the achievements of Norwegian social democracy are now undermined by the dictates of capitalist globalization. But if traditional social-democratic statism seems both ineffective and unappealing, the electoral resurgence of the SV—the new left ‘red-green’ party which tripled its representation in the December elections—supplies a needed element of socialist renewal.

In recent celebration of the ‘free market’ it has often been forgotten that market forces can batten upon and intensify already-existing communal differences and divisions. No more baleful example of this can be found than the construction and consolidation of systems of racial difference in the Americas in the modern epoch. In a powerful and challenging essay Barbara Fields argues that racism did not produce slavery and that the racism associated with the antebellum South was in some ways less virulent than that which was to develop in the North, and in the South after slavery’s suppression. Fields argues that racial ideologies should not be conceived as self-sufficient, ‘biological’ entities but rather understood as the distillation in everyday life of the logic of specific patterns of power, wealth and opportunity.

In NLR 179 Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnet and Simon Bromley examined the record of the Thatcher government, arguing that while its policies may have benefited some factions of capital, its overall economic failure has undermined the radical dynamic of third-period Thatcherism. In this issue Colin Leys ripostes that, understood in capitalist terms, Thatcher’s

achievement has in fact been far more impressive. Major defeats have been inflicted on the trade unions, and the whole terrain of political discourse has been wrenched far to the right. Leys concludes that Stuart Hall's writings still furnish an indispensable framework for understanding British politics.

The last decade has seen an uneven spread of bourgeois democracy within the Third World. In NLR 169 Benedict Anderson identified the oligarchic structures underlying democratic politics in the Philippines. In this issue he shows that the changing pattern of political murder in Thailand has been a sensitive barometer of underlying social relations. Anderson's ingenious and laconic account of intra-elite slaying explains how the latter has prompted a degree of popular satisfaction.

The mathematical theory of chaos can sometimes seem to lend itself all too easily to exploitation by irrationalism and mysticism. In this issue of the Review Harmke Kamminga explains the real import of this new branch of mathematical modelling, stressing the special assumptions upon which it is built, as well as the new results which it yields.

---

### FORTHCOMING IN NLR

Perry Anderson, *A Culture in Contraflow—II*; Julian Stallabrass, *The Idea of the Primitive*; Christopher Bertram, *International Competition in Historical Materialism*; Maxine Molyneux, *The 'Woman Question' in the Age of Perestroika*; Eric Foner, *Blacks and the Constitution 1789–1989*.

---

## **The Case for Socialism**

by Paul Foot

At last there is a real chance of getting rid of the Tories—but what is the alternative? A Labour Party whose flag is the palest pink? Or a socialism decisively rejected by the workers of Eastern Europe? Was either ever socialist? This book rejects this 'socialism from above' and looks at the revolutionary alternative to a failing capitalism, East and West.

£2.50 / US\$4.00

## **Trotsky: The sword of the revolution 1917-23**

by Tony Cliff

The second volume of Cliff's biography takes Trotsky from 1917, the eve of workers' power, to 1923, the eve of Stalin's power. Why did Trotsky not fulfil his agreement with the ailing Lenin and start an immediate political offensive against the growing bureaucracy and against Stalin? £6.95 / US\$11.95

## **The Politics of James Connolly**

by Kieran Allen

The Marxist James Connolly was an enigma: his greatest writings were a direct challenge to the nationalists in whose company, in 1916, he was to fight and die. This book is a revolutionary socialist analysis of the contradictions in Connolly's strategy for Irish freedom. £5.00 / US\$8.50 (Special edition available only through the Bookmarks Club—phone us for the current list).

## **International Socialism 2:47**

The Summer 1990 issue includes Ahmed Shawki on Black Liberation and Socialism in the US, John Rees on Trotsky's contribution to the Marxist method, Chris Harman on the Fourth International, Steve Wright on Hal Draper and Paul Vernel on Postmodernism. £2.50 / US\$4.00

All titles are available from good bookshops; also by mail order (please add 60p / \$1.00 per title for postage) from:

### **Bookmarks London**

265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE, England. Phone 01-802 6145.

### **Bookmarks Chicago**

PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616, USA. Phone 312-666-7337.



**NEW  
TTILES  
Summer  
1990**

Theodore Friedgut  
Lewis Siegelbaum

## *Perestroika from Below: The Soviet Miners' Strike and its Aftermath*

In the wave of social activism that has washed over the Soviet Union in recent years, the strike by some 400,000 coal miners in the summer of 1989 may be the most poorly understood of events.\* Inter-ethnic conflict in the Caucasus, the movements toward independence in the Baltic, competing currents among the Russian intelligentsia and within the Communist Party, are all complex phenomena. Nonetheless, in each case, even as these developments continue to unfold new content, we have some idea of what the objectives are and of what is at stake. This has been much less the case with respect to the miners. Why they went on strike, or, perhaps more intriguingly, against whom or what they struck, was not clarified in the accounts of Soviet or Western reporters. Why the strike committees did not dissolve after the strike but in effect remain in existence to this day is still unclear; it is also a fact little known. And yet the miners' strike may prove to be among the most significant influences on the course of *perestroika*, redefining both its direction and its limits. If, before the strike, *perestroika* was largely a state

initiative that meant 'openness for intellectuals and discipline for workers', in the period since the strike, both the state and intellectuals have had to tread more warily for fear of exciting other workers to follow the example of the miners.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, how workers fit into the scheme of *perestroika*, and how *perestroika* is perceived by them, are questions that remain largely unclear. But the fact that such questions are now being raised in many different circles in Soviet society, and that Soviet workers can no longer be considered as merely the passive objects of reformist models concocted in research institutes, are among the consequences of the miners' strike.

Our awareness of these problems was sharpened by a three-week visit to Donetsk in the immediate aftermath of the strike. There we observed the strike committees in session, held in-depth interviews with numerous strike activists, and met on several occasions rank-and-file miners and steel workers and other locals of Donetsk. In addition we studied the local press and a number of documents dealing with the strike and its aftermath. The following account, then, draws on these experiences as well as on our reading of the national and non-Soviet press, and on our backgrounds as students of Soviet politics and history. The depth and immediacy of our experience in Donetsk led us to focus our analysis there, drawing reinforcement and comparison from press accounts of the Kuzbass and other striking coalfields.

### The Soviet Coal Industry

Over one million people are employed in the coal mining industry in the Soviet Union—considerably more than in any other country. Despite the growing importance in recent decades of nuclear power, natural gas, and other sources of energy, coal remains a major component in the Soviet fuel balance.<sup>2</sup> The Chernobyl disaster and the resulting backlash against nuclear power have only increased the importance of coal. The main coalfields in the USSR are the Donbass in the eastern Ukraine and the Kuzbass in western Siberia. These are supplemented by various smaller coalfields scattered throughout the Soviet Union. Of the 720 million tons of coal produced in the USSR in 1986, the Donbass accounted for 259 million tons or 36 per cent. The Kuzbass produced slightly over 160 million tons or 22 per cent. Of the two, the Donbass is considerably older, and its deposits, first discovered early in the eighteenth century, have been worked intensively

---

\* This is a revised version of 'The Soviet Miners' Strike, July 1989', published in *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 804, University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies.

<sup>1</sup> For the characterization, see Michael Burawoy, 'Reflections on the Class Consciousness of Hungarian Steel Workers', *Politics and Society*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1989, p. 26. To Burawoy's credit, he referred to this as 'a potentially explosive combination'. See also Ben Elklöf, *Soviet Briefing: Gorbachev and the Reform Period*, Colorado 1989, p. 116, where skilled workers are said to support democratization but are sceptical about economic reform.

<sup>2</sup> For some figures see Judith Thornton, 'Estimating the Demand for Energy in the Centrally Planned Economies', in Robert G. Jensen, Theodore Shabad, and Arthur W. Wright, eds., *Soviet Natural Resources in the World Economy*, Chicago and London 1983, p. 299.



for over a hundred years. Development of the Kuzbass mines began in the industrialization of the 1920s, but extensive operations date from World War II and the reconstruction period of the 1950s. Whereas deep underground mining is practised in the Donbass, open-cast production predominates in the Kuzbass. This difference is of some importance in the economics of mining in the two regions, with Kuzbass coal being produced much more cheaply than that of the Donetsk Basin.

The Soviet coal industry is administered by a vast bureaucratic network at the centre of which is the USSR Ministry of the Coal Industry, situated in Moscow. Below this ministry are large regional production associations (*ob'edineniya*) such as *Donetskugol'*, *Kemerovugol'*, and so forth.<sup>3</sup> The ministry had been, until the strike, the juridical owner of the mines, setting annual and quarterly production quotas, allocating investment funds and wage funds, and controlling the disposal of the mines' production in conjunction with Gosplan and other central agencies, on the basis of their estimates of the demand for coal and the capacity of the various mines. Plans and resource allocations are disaggregated as they move down from Moscow through the territorial production associations to the mines in a complex negotiation process. Working conditions are also centrally determined by government committees, in conjunction with the Moscow-based Central Committee of the Union of Coal Miners.

### Declining Output

There is one additional important fact: the output of the coal-mining industry has stagnated since the mid 1970s. In the course of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (1981-1985), the shortfall in coal production amounted to 145 million tons. Table 1 shows the decline in the rate of growth of coal mining.

Table 1. USSR Total Coal Output for Selected Years  
(in millions of tons)

	Output	Average Annual Increase
1950	261.1	-
1955	400.0	27.8
1960	509.6	21.9
1970	624.1	11.5
1975	701.3	15.4
1985	718.0	1.7

Sources: *Bel'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, 3rd ed., vol. 26, 1977, p. 464; P.M. Malyavin, F.S. Bocharov and A.V. Likhobabin, *Shakhovye gornyye trudy*, Moscow 1986, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Until the beginning of 1989 the administration of the industry was further complicated by the existence of ministries in the coal-producing republics as well as in Moscow. These were abolished as part of Gorbachev's programme to reduce the administrative apparatus of the Soviet Union.

Among the many causes of this situation, two stand out. The first is geological. The century of intensive coal production in the Donbass has meant that miners have had to go ever deeper into the earth. The average depth of underground mines in the USSR is 410 metres, but in the Donbass 79 of the 136 mines are more than 700 metres below the surface, and 15 are more than a kilometre deep.<sup>4</sup> The deeper the mine, the higher the temperature and the greater the complexity and expense of pumping out water, ventilation (particularly to prevent accumulations of explosive methane gas), putting miners down to the coalface, and raising the coal. The second problem is linked. Investment in modern equipment and in mine development has lagged badly in recent years, as oil, gas and nuclear power have been given greater priority. As one miner told the Twenty-seventh CPSU Congress in February 1986: 'My fellow cutters and I are using the same jack hammers as fifty years ago. This state of affairs has to be corrected immediately.'<sup>5</sup>

### How the Coal Strike Developed

The July strike could not have been a surprise to the Soviet authorities, central or local. It had been preceded in March by two brief strikes at the Lidievka and Kirov mines in Donetsk. At the plenum of the Donetsk City Party Committee (*gorkom*) on 24 June 1989 the miners' extreme discontent was expressed in a demand that the Minister of the Coal Industry, Shchadov, should resign. Telegrams to this effect were sent to the Supreme Soviet in an attempt to prevent his confirmation as minister in the new Soviet government formed after the Spring 1989 elections. Gorbachev himself, while visiting Donetsk in June, had been informed of the ferment and its background.<sup>6</sup> The problem, then, was not a lack of warning but rather a lack of attention from the authorities. In the Kuzbass, workers at the Shevyakovo mine had formulated demands without any interruption of production, and had sent them to the Central Committee of the Soviet trade-union organization on 28 December 1988. That body forwarded the demands to the regional trade-union executive, which passed them down to the industrial association to which the mine belongs, from whence they were returned, without comment or recommendation, to the mine director.<sup>7</sup> Judging from the subsequent recriminations and breast-beating by all the Party and trade-union authorities after the strike, this would appear to have been the general

<sup>4</sup> *Bel' shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, 3rd ed., vol. 26, 1977, p. 464.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in P.M. Malyavin, F.S. Bocharov and A.V. Likhobabin, *Shakhty i gornyye truda*, Moscow 1986, p. 183. Miners speaking to us in Donetsk in August 1989 had much the same complaint. For a graphic description of the technological backwardness of one Donetsk mine, see Jonathan Steele, 'Shock Waves from the Coal Face', *The Guardian*, 13 October 1989, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 16 August 1989, report of V.G. Ignatov to plenum of the Donetsk *gorkom*. *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta*, no. 32, August 1989, p. 5, reports two similar brief strikes in the Pavlograd coal mines of the western Donbass in the spring of 1989. The Kuzbass coal strike of July was preceded by a brief and unorganized strike in the spring.

<sup>7</sup> *Mashynske novosti*, no. 32, 6 August 1989, p. 8, interview with Teimuraz Avalyani, chairman of the Kemerovo strike committee.

pattern throughout the country. Each level of administration passed complaints, demands, or recommendations on to a higher or lower level, without any action ever having been taken, thus allowing each party to blame others for inaction.

The explosive situation of the miners' discontent and lack of faith in the authorities should have been clear immediately after the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies in March 1989. Among those voted down by the electorate were the first secretaries of the Kemerovo *oblast'* Party Committee (*obkhom*) and City Party Committee (*gorhom*), the chairman of the *oblast'* Soviet Executive Committee, and the directors of *Kemerosvangel'* and the Kemerovo Railroad Administration.<sup>8</sup> Deputies who were elected from the region attempted to warn the Congress of the explosive situation in the Kuzbass, but their warnings were lost among the multitude of issues being addressed.

The coal miners' strike began on 10 July in a single mine in the Kuzbass city of Mezhdurechensk. Within a week 158 Kuzbass mines had been closed and 177,862 miners were on strike.<sup>9</sup> From the Kuzbass, action spread to Karaganda, Pechora, the Lvov region, Rostov, and the Donbass.<sup>10</sup> On 12 July, the Minister of the Coal Industry, Mikhail Shchadov, arrived in Mezhdurechensk to begin negotiations with the strikers. By the next day a tentative agreement had been worked out, but by that time the strike had spread throughout the region, and when it had reached its peak on 17 July a joint commission of government, Party and trade-union officials, headed by Politburo member Nikolai Sliunkov, came to deal with the crisis.

There was a direct and palpable link between the Siberian strike and the Donbass. Questioned about the relation between the strikes, the Donbass people reluctantly admitted that a delegation of Siberian miners had visited, reported, and urged them to join the strike.<sup>11</sup> Beginning in Makeevka on the morning of 17 July, the strike spread to Pavlograd and from there to Donetsk. The Donetsk miners' response appears to have been based as much on a sense of occupational solidarity as on any particular grievance.<sup>12</sup> At the Kalinin mine in Donetsk, and presumably at all the other mines as well, Party organizers were busy explaining to the workers that the government and the Supreme Soviet were fully informed of the miners' grievances, that these grievances were seen as justified, and that there was no need to

---

<sup>8</sup> *Pravda*, 30 March 1989, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 30, (459), 29 July-4 August 1989.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, 21 July 1989.

<sup>11</sup> This information came up twice in conversations with strike activists. Their reluctance to speak about this link was based on a fear that they might be regarded as having taken part in an organized conspiracy, or the founding of a 'second party'. *Ekonomicheskiye prava*, no. 32, August 1989, p. 3, noted that the Pavlograd miners were in touch with those in both the Donbass and Siberia as to methods and demands. In addition, the common phenomenon of the 'sitdown in the square' attests to a clear demonstration effect, if not to direct coordination.

<sup>12</sup> *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 31 July 1989, citing the report of a sociological survey taken during the strike. It is interesting that the report refers to *occupational* solidarity rather than *class* solidarity.

strike.<sup>13</sup> The Party bosses and mine executives of Donetsk later admitted to having indulged in wishful thinking in their belief that such tactics would prove effective.<sup>14</sup> The manner in which the authorities in Moscow handled the Kuzbass strike may also inadvertently have led to its spread to other regions. For among the complaints voiced by the Donetsk first secretary against the central Party organs and the media was a charge that *Pravda* had published an erroneous statement claiming that whatever settlement was worked out with the Siberian miners would be restricted in application to that region.<sup>15</sup> In this context, the dispatch to the Kuzbass of Sliunkov's high-level commission of Party, trade-union and government representatives backfired by conveying the impression that the authorities were treating the strike as a strictly regional affair.

The beginning of the strike in Donetsk was nevertheless tentative. On 18 July the Lidievka and Abakumov mines went on strike briefly while general meetings of the miners drew up a list of demands, returning to work once these had been presented to the mine administration. At the Zasyadko mine the miners informed their director—a much respected man who even today retains the miners' confidence—of their intention to strike. He agreed with their decision, letting them know that he considered their demands entirely justified, but suggesting that they wait until some other mine had walked out, and then follow them, joining the strike, rather than initiating it.

The miners of the 'Socialist Donbass' mine were those who tipped the balance. On the morning of 19 July they refused to work, and in the evening, following the Siberian miners' example, marched in orderly ranks, four abreast, along an eight-kilometre route from their mine, in work clothes and with lanterns glowing, to sit in the square facing the *obkom* and *oblast'* soviet headquarters. The next morning, all twenty-one coal mines in the city of Donetsk were on strike and had representatives in the square. There, for the next five days, shifts of miners sat day and night, discussing their grievances, formulating demands and receiving reports on the progress of negotiations. They sat according to work shifts, each shift foreman marking his miners' attendance, with each mine assigned a quota of men to be at the square.

### The Strike Committees

Although the strike was spontaneous and at the beginning had no organizing body, the miners soon displayed a fine talent for organization and for discipline. They were alone and had only themselves on which to rely. For at the strike's outset, with the exception of two mine directors and a small handful of engineering and supervisory personnel, neither Party, nor trade-union, nor administrative officials were willing to be tainted by association with what was denounced by

---

<sup>13</sup> Report of V. Kurasov, Party organizer of the Kalinin mine, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Report of Ignatov to *gorkom*, *ibid.*, 16 August 1989.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

one official as 'an illegal act, that remains an illegal act to this day, as we have no law as yet permitting such actions.'<sup>66</sup>

At the various mines, initiative groups convened meetings which elected strike committees representing the rank-and-file miners. Interested and active miners sought advice, going to the square for consultation. When Yurii Boldyrev of the Gorky mine heard that the 'Socialist Donbass' miners were in the square, he ran to them, conferred the whole night with their leaders, and helped to frame the strike demands. At dawn he returned to his mine to oversee the formation of a strike committee. The strike committee at each mine found itself headquarters, commandeered a telephone, and made contact with the other mines to compare experiences. At the Kuibyshev mine the committee set itself up in the political education room of the mine's Party committee.<sup>67</sup> The general pattern was that each section of a mine elected delegates to the strike committee.

The committees' members were generally young, averaging about thirty-five years of age. This was explained as a reflection of the fear amongst older workers of retribution after the strike. They wanted only to reach pension age quietly and get out. The younger men were bolder and, it must be noted, are better educated on the whole than their predecessors, not a few having received a higher education. The membership was also overwhelmingly male—in the Kuibyshev strike committee there were two women out of thirty-two, and in the Panfilov mine only one woman (a deputy chairperson of the committee) out of twenty-five. While the mines have a majority male work force and women have not worked at the coalface since the late 1950s, there are nevertheless large numbers of women employed in the mines in technical, maintenance and service capacities, and their representation on the strike committees was not commensurate with this presence. When asked what the role of women was in the strike, the miners replied that their wives brought them hot food when they were sitting in the square.

Significantly, one quarter of the membership of the Donetsk strike committees were Party members, a fact proudly put forward by both the first secretary of the Donetsk *obkom* and the first secretary of the Donetsk *gor'kom* to indicate that the Party played an active and influential role in the strike. Indeed, these strike-committee Communists were almost exclusively rank-and-file members or low-level activists. Valeryi Samofalov and Gennady Kush of the Kuibyshev mine strike committee had been Komsomol organizers, while Yurii Boldyrev and his friend Sergei Vasil'ev, initiators of the Gorky mine committee, had been respectively Party group organizer (*partgruport*) and trade-union representative of their mine section—about which we will hear

<sup>66</sup> Speech of the chairman of the Donetsk *oblast'* Trade Union Committee to a territorial conference, *Vecherny Donets*, 1 August 1989. The chairman had evidently not yet learned the new slogan 'All that is not prohibited is permitted.' Since then, of course, the new law defining and delimiting the right to strike has passed the Supreme Soviet (see below).

<sup>67</sup> *Shakhtar' shi slava*, no. 29 (858), 1 August 1989. Two weeks after the strike they were still operating there on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis.

more later.<sup>28</sup> In no way can the strike be considered a revolt against Communism. Rather it was an attempt to attack the *apparát* at the grass-roots level and replace it with a truly representative and democratically elected local leadership. As *Pravda* put it, 'not just Party leaders but also many economic and trade-union leaders "drowned" in the mighty wave of the strike.'<sup>29</sup> For many leaders of the strike committees the strike was a conscious effort to extricate *perestroika* from the clutches of their immediate bosses, who were widely perceived as having blocked or distorted its thrust.

The strike committees very rapidly became the centre of activity in the striking areas. Some of them sat in virtually continuous session; all maintained around-the-clock telephone watches. Almost immediately they received all manner of requests and complaints from the public. Miners, other workers, and citizens from all walks of life turned to the strike committees with requests for help in obtaining medical care, housing repairs and financial assistance. The public evidently saw these bodies as authoritative institutions that would replace discredited local officials in dealing with the many daily problems that plague the Soviet citizen. This was the case in the Kuzbass city of Kemerovo, where the strike committee found itself besieged by citizens who assumed that at last they had an institution to help them. Petitioners lined up all day for a stamp and signature to enable them to get a bank loan; for advice about what to do when the person renting them a room wanted to terminate the lease; and to discuss a host of other everyday problems that fell far beyond the responsibilities the strike committees ever intended to undertake.

Anxious to maintain the integrity of their strike, the miners set up a *druzhina* that cordoned off the square from the public, chasing away the numerous drunks who at first attempted to join the strikers. At the same time, they sent a delegation to the city's militia commander, demanding that all sources of alcohol be shut down immediately. They also established patrols to keep order in the streets.<sup>30</sup> When the union authorities awoke belatedly to the fact that they were entirely isolated from the flow of events, they attempted to enter the picture by bringing field kitchens with food to the square. They were greeted with contemptuous jibes of 'Who are you and what do you want? We

<sup>28</sup> The profile of the Donetsk committees is drawn from observation of three committees and from: *Sotsialisticheskii Donbas*, 2 August 1989; *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 16 August 1989; and *Shakhter'ska slava*, no. 29 (858), 1 August 1989. In the Kuzbass, there were 11 strike committees averaging 30 members each. The average age was 37 years, and 82 per cent of the members were workers. Communists comprised 38.3 per cent of the members, and included 4 secretaries of primary Party organizations, 3 chairmen of trade-union committees, and 8 chairmen of councils of the work collective. See *Pravda*, 21 August 1989.

<sup>29</sup> *Pravda*, 19 August 1989, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Valeryi Samofalov, chairman of the Kuibyshev mine strike committee. The result of the patrols and the closing of alcohol outlets was a reported 30 per cent drop in crime during the period of the strike. The city militia commander later said that any miner who wished would be received into the ranks of the militia. Similar arrangements were in force during the Kuzbass strike where 450 bottles of illicit spirit and two kilograms of *amasba*, a hashish-like drug, were seized on the second day of the strike. See *Argumenty i fakty*, 30 (459), 27 July-4 August 1989.

## ■ Publication Details

*Feminist Review* is published three times a year, in March, July and November. Each issue is approximately 128 pages and is 234mm x 153mm in size.

Individual issues are also available from bookshops.

ISSN: 0141-7789

## Subscription Details

(Calendar year only)

**UK** Individuals: £18.00  
Institutions: £40.00

**US** Individuals: \$38.00  
Institutions: \$78.00

**ROW** Individuals: £24.00  
Institutions: £46.00

Single copies and back issues: £7.99

Prices are subject to alteration without notice

**Back Issues include:**

**Special Issue 31:**

## The Past Before Us: 20 years of Feminism

It's now two decades since women's liberation exploded into the political arena in the wake of the '68 student movement. In this special issue *Feminist Review* reflects on 20 years of feminism; with articles by **Lynne Segal, Pratibha Parmar, Sheila Rowbotham, Frigga Haug** – plus an exclusive interview with Angela Davis.

**Special Issue 28:**

## Family Secrets: Child Sexual Abuse Today

A range of feminist perspectives on an issue of urgent contemporary significance: this examines responses in the field of social work, law, education and the media – as well as looking at individual experience.

**Special Issue 17:**

## Many Voices, One Chant: Black Feminist Perspectives

Produced by a guest editorial group of black women, and including feature articles by **Valerie Amos**, **Pratibha Parmar**, **Amina Mama** and **Parita Trivedi**.

## ORDER FORM

feminist Review

Please return to: Sharon McDuell, Routledge Promotion Department,  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE. (Tel: 071-583 9855)

- ☐ I would like to subscribe to **Feminist Review**
- ☐ Please send me a sample copy
- ☐ Please send back Issues number(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ I enclose my cheque for \_\_\_\_\_ made payable to Routledge Journals
- ☐ Please charge my Access/Eurocard/Visa/American Express/Diners Club

[illegible]

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Please send me your Media & Cultural Studies/Sociology/Journals Catalogue\*  
(\*Delete as appropriate)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

If the registered address of your credit card is different from the above, please give this separately.

Leaflet ISBN 0-418-15440-6



Summer 1990

Issue 35

Includes **Barbara Norden** on the Campaign Against Pornography, **Prue Chamberlayne** on The Mothers Manifesto, **Lata Mani** on Feminist Scholarship, **Beverley Alcock** and **Jocelyn Robson** on Cagney and Lacey, **Ruth Carter** and **Gill Kirkup** on women in engineering, **Katrina Rolley** on the dress of Radcliffe Hall and Una Troubridge, and **Elizabeth Wilson** on Deviant Dress.

Autumn 1990

Issue 36

Includes articles on the current differences and debates between feminists on the questions around Pornography and Censorship.



Writers featured in *Feminist Review* have included: Valerie Amos, Susan Ardill, Michele Barrett, Catherine Clement, Cynthia Cockburn, Ros Coward, Angela Davis, Mary McIntosh, Maria Macciochi, Amina Mama, Mandy Merck, Trin-t Minh-ha, Toril Moi, Sue O'Sullivan, Pratibha Parmar, Cindy Patton, Griselda Pollock, Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Ségel, Michelene Wandor, Elizabeth Wilson, Janice Winship ... and many more.

Subscription details overleaf



# *Feminist Review*

## *A major voice in international feminism*

First published in 1979, *Feminist Review* is the UK's leading socialist feminist journal. Produced three times a year by a London-based editorial collective, the journal publishes and reviews new work by women and offers a platform for debate on current issues in feminism.

International in scope, *Feminist Review* features articles on socialist feminist theory, race, class and sexuality, women in history, black and Third World women, as well as poetry and reviews. Regular special issues apply this breadth of perspective to topical subject areas, from child sexual abuse to contemporary lesbian politics.

**Spring 1990**

### **Special Issue 34**

#### **Perverse Politics: Lesbian Issues**

This special issue maps the field of contemporary lesbian politics and culture, and highlights lesbians' special contribution to debates at the heart of feminism.

It includes:

**Margaret Hunt** on social purity movements, **Jewelle Gomez** and **Barbara Smith** on homophobia in the black community, **Ann Tobin** on lesbians and the Labour Party, **Gail Lewis** on the writer Audre Lorde, **Diane Hamer** on lesbians and psychoanalytic theory and **Inge Blackman** and **Kathryn Perry** on lesbian fashion for the 1990s. Plus contributions on lesbian archives, pornography in film and fiction, international reports from lesbian activists, and an interview with Cindy Patton on lesbians, AIDS and sexuality.



# *Feminist Review*

ROUTLEDGE



don't know you.' A trade-union official attempting to address the strikers on the square was chased from the platform by a storm of jeers and whistles that drowned out his efforts.

The organization of the strike differed from mine to mine. Vladislav Shepelenko, director of the Skochinskii mine, told his workers that he was against them striking for fear that the mine would be ruined by neglect. After a stormy discussion among the workers, it was agreed that maintenance and safety work would continue. Shepelenko then announced that he would join the strike, was elected on the spot to the mine's strike committee, and led his men to the square. In the Kapital'naya mine, the workers walked out spontaneously, making no provision for the safety and maintenance of the mine. A young engineer in charge of one of the shafts told the men that if they did not set up a maintenance detail he would resign, leaving a letter stating that any loss of life or material damage was the responsibility of the miners themselves. Sobered by this possibility, the miners set up a maintenance-duty roster under the supervision of the engineer.<sup>21</sup> In some mines, collapses and flooding caused damage amounting to hundreds of thousands of rubles.<sup>22</sup> On the whole, however, miners were conscious that maintaining the mines was in their own interest, and in most cases they provided for pumping and ventilation.<sup>23</sup> After the strike the workers at the Stakhanov mine suggested that the draft law regulating strikes, then under consideration by the Supreme Soviet, should include an article defining the responsibility for the mine or enterprise during any strike.<sup>24</sup>

### Causes of the Strike

Why did the strike break out at this time, and why did it spread so widely? A multitude of discontents contributed. Yet the causes must be separated from the strike demands. Essentially, the outbreak of the strike was the result of frustrated expectations.<sup>25</sup> In a survey conducted for the Soviet Sociological Association by Dr. G. Shalygin of Donetsk, 75 per cent of the 216 mine workers polled named this factor as the primary cause. Summarizing the workers' statements, the survey reported that people were tired of waiting for promises to be fulfilled, that they had felt freed from 'serfdom' by *glasnost*, that fear had vanished, thinking awakened, and that the media had encouraged

<sup>21</sup> After the strike the engineer was elected to be fully in charge of the shaft, and his superior, who had been on vacation throughout the strike, was told to retire on pension.

<sup>22</sup> Shepelenko's story is in *Sotsialisticheskiy Donbass*, 8 August 1989. The young engineer told his story to one of us. Mention of damage is in the *gorbom* secretary's report, *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 16 August 1989.

<sup>23</sup> See the discussion among foreign correspondents who covered the strike in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 30 August 1989, p. 10; also *Moskovskie novosti*, no. 30, 1989, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Sotsialisticheskiy Donbass*, 1 August 1989.

<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, the explanation of the secretary of the Kuibyshev *rudnik*, L.S. Butov, in *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 31 July 1989: 'The dissatisfaction of the people was linked to the talk of *perestroika* and the fact that in terms of standard of living no improvement had taken place.'

a popular rejection of the bureaucracy. Significantly, 50 per cent of respondents added that professional solidarity played a part in their motivation.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to the view of some observers, it was not fear of the disruptive effects of economic reform that drove the mines to strike, but rather anxiety that *perestroika* was passing them by.<sup>27</sup> 'We haven't yet seen *perestroika*', was the comment often heard. If the intelligentsia had hitherto been the most vociferous champion of reform, it was now the workers' turn. As the chairman of the Kuibyshev mine strike committee told us with evident pride, 'We are now ahead of the intelligentsia.' Certainly the miners knew what was going on elsewhere in the country. They could not help but compare the prodigious growth of the cooperative movement, particularly in the consumer-service sector, and the new opportunities for kolkhoz members to acquire leasehold plots of land—as well as a myriad of other new or projected reforms—with the conditions in which their own industry was mired.

Among the specific grievances cited in the survey, the lack of consumer goods headed the list (mentioned by 86 per cent of respondents), followed by low pay (mentioned by 79 per cent). These were followed by: inadequate vacations (62 per cent), pension provisions (50 per cent), high prices (41 per cent), poor housing (41 per cent) and frictions with management (38 per cent).<sup>28</sup> The economic grievances do not reflect in any simple way the miners' actual situation in Soviet society, for an average coal miner earns about 450 roubles per month—nearly twice the income of the average Soviet industrial worker.<sup>29</sup> Miners' incomes are therefore above the average for the Soviet population, and consequently the overwhelming majority live above the poverty line.<sup>30</sup> Their pensions—granted to underground workers at the age of fifty, rather than at sixty as is the case for other Soviet males—are also greater than the general industrial pension.

---

<sup>26</sup> Some of the data from the survey was published in *Izvestiya*, 12 August 1989. Additional details were included in the report of first secretary Ignatov to the Donetsk *perkhom*.

<sup>27</sup> For an alternative interpretation, see David Seppo, 'Miners' Strike Opens New Act in Perestroika', *International Viewpoint*, no. 170, 2 October 1989, pp. 10–17.

<sup>28</sup> The *Izvestiya* account includes reference without percentages to poor working conditions and inadequate medical care. These are not mentioned by Ignatov.

<sup>29</sup> *Sotsialisticheski Donbass*, 1 August 1989, gave the average monthly wage of all Soviet workers as 236 roubles. *Chess' Shakhmaty*, the newspaper of Gorky mine, gave the average wage at the mine as 434 roubles per month in July 1989, down from 458 in July the previous year. Miners, asked about their pay, responded with sums as high as 600 roubles per month. Miners' wages have been consistently higher than average industrial wages since World War II. In 1955 the index of Miners' wages as compared to the average for workers and salaried employees was 162. This rose to 183 in 1966, but fell back to 169 in 1975. This index would currently stand at 190, indicating a gain in relative status for miners rather than the loss generally perceived by them.

<sup>30</sup> The sociological survey showed that 40 per cent of the miners have over 130 roubles per month per family member, while 48 per cent have between 71 and 130 roubles, and 12 per cent live at the poverty level of 70 roubles or less per person. The Soviet poverty level was recently defined as 80 roubles per person per month. At the same time it was stated that 45 million Soviet citizens live below this level. This constitutes about 16 per cent of the general Soviet population.

At the same time, the miners' standard of housing accommodation is below the international and Soviet minimum. The sanitary minimum in the Soviet Union is set at 9 square metres of living space per person. Half the strikers polled lived in accommodation of between 5 and 9 square metres per person, while an additional 23 per cent had less than 4 square metres per person. The *oblast* first secretary, in his report, noted that 20 per cent less housing was being built than fifteen years previously, while the waiting list for housing was half as long again as it had been in 1980. Among the workers of three mines, a construction trust and a transport centre in the Kuibyshev district of Donetsk, a total of 10,148 families now wait for housing, an increase of 3,045 since 1985. In the whole of 1988, only 494 families received housing in the district.<sup>31</sup>

To the foreign visitor, the settlements adjoining the mines of Donetsk appear picturesque. Single-story whitewashed cottages trimmed in bright blue abut upon dirt roads, and with their fruit trees and vegetable gardens they present a picture from another epoch. That is just the problem. As one coal cutter put it, with only mild hyperbole, 'Many miners live in such conditions that if a film were shot here you would think it was 1905.'<sup>32</sup> In Kemerovo *oblast'*, a reported 20 per cent of the population lives in decrepit housing or has no fixed accommodation whatsoever.<sup>33</sup> The strike demand regarding housing was that it be provided at such a rate that no family after applying should have to wait more than *six years* for accommodation.

In almost every sphere of life and work, miners' conditions have been deteriorating steadily. Ecological conditions in the Donbass are better than those in Siberia but are nevertheless still calamitous, even though a concerted if not entirely successful effort has been made to sweep back the sea of pollutants. The twenty-one mines within the Donetsk city limits, the Lenin Steel Works employing 17,000 people, and the additional mines and chemical plants that crowd the city on every side, choke it with fumes and coal dust. Were it not for a determined effort by the local authorities to provide every street with a double row of trees, and to lace the city with parks and playgrounds as 'green lungs' (featuring rose gardens that are the pride of the entire population), it would be almost uninhabitable. In June 1989 the steel factory discharged 7.2 times the permissible level of sulphuric anhydrides, 6.7

<sup>31</sup> See the report of A. Ya. Vinnik to the plenum of the *oblast*, *Sotsialisticheski Donbass*, 2 August 1989, and *Shakhtar'she slava*, no. 16, 18 July, 1989.

<sup>32</sup> *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 30, 1989, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> For an account of the horrifying health conditions in Kemerovo *oblast'* due to pollution, see *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 30 (459), 28 July-4 August 1989. 50 per cent of infants are in need of resuscitation at birth; eye diseases are 72 per cent above the national average; bronchial asthma is 7.5 times as high as a rural control region, etc. *Pravda*, 21 August 1989, writes of an incidence of cancer 10 to 15 times the national average, 50 per cent of workers suffering some chronic illness, and 87 per cent of newly born children suffering either physical or mental abnormalities. See also *Pravda*, 1 July 1988, speech of K.Z. Romazanov of Karaganda to the Nineteenth Party Conference: four tons of pollutants per capita annually, including mercury, phenol, hydrogen cyanide, etc., causing 'dead zones' of tens of kilometres around industrial centres.

times the level of hydrogen sulphide, and 2.1 times the permissible level of dust.<sup>34</sup> The territorial coal association, *Donetskugol'*, was also cited for its failure to comply with sewage and waste-disposal provisions.

Investment in the mines has been insufficient for maintenance of production and improvement of working conditions. In the Stakhanov mine, only three of eleven sections work properly, owing to poor maintenance. The result is that the pressure to fulfil the plan inevitably involves turning a blind eye to safety regulations. This was said to have been the cause of the gas explosion a few years ago that killed a large number of miners.<sup>35</sup> As a matter of course, 22,000 Donetsk miners work in conditions defined as 'high temperature', and much work is done by hand, laboriously and unproductively, for lack of appropriate technology.<sup>36</sup>

### Pressure from Below

Aside from frustrated expectations and deteriorating conditions, there was a long-festering resentment of the corruption and hypocrisy that had permeated the entire ruling stratum. Two incidents will illustrate this. At the Kuibyshev mine at the start of the 1980s, a *sabbotnik* (voluntary working day, usually on Saturday) had been scheduled. However, when the miners found that necessary materials had not been provided and that they would spend their hours underground in idleness, they refused to report for the shift, saying that they were not children to be provided with work to keep them busy. The mine director accused them of being like the Poles: wanting to work less and eat more. They replied that they wanted to work well and eat well, and it was the fault of the administration that they did not have the necessary working materials. At which point the Party secretary interjected that if the miners' entire agenda was similar to this, then their next meeting would not be with the Party committee, but with a different committee in a different building.<sup>37</sup>

The second incident was more protracted. It involved Yurii Boldyrev and his two friends, Sergei Vasil'ev and Vyacheslav Mukhopad. Boldyrev, a graduate in physics from Donetsk University, had been an early enthusiast of *perestroika*, and had joined the Communist Party immediately after the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in the spring of 1986. Together with his friends, he had sought ways of implementing *perestroika* at the Gorky mine where all three worked. They finally found their lead in an article in *Kommunist*, the Party theoretical and ideological journal. The idea was simple. *Perestroika* was a vast undertaking, and Soviet society too huge and complex, for reforms to be instituted

<sup>34</sup> *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 18 July 1989, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication to one of the authors from a Donetsk mine engineer. Welders were sent in to set up metal pit supports despite knowledge that there was gas in the mine. See also *Sotsialisticheskii Donbass*, 1 August 1989 and 12 August 1989.

<sup>36</sup> See *Sotsialisticheskii Donbass*, 12 August 1989, and *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 31 July 1989. Indignant miners at the Kuibyshev mine wanted to take us to the coalface to show us the working conditions there, but were dissuaded by their colleagues, lest some accident befall a foreigner, causing a scandal.

<sup>37</sup> This story was recited to the authors at a meeting of the Kuibyshev mine strike committee. The 'other committee' was of course the Committee for State Security—the KGB.

from above. In each small group, a start had to be made in introducing democratic change and civic activism. *Perestroika* had to reach up from below to meet the efforts initiated from above.<sup>38</sup>

Boldyrev was the Party group organizer for the brigade that tended the lifts, raising the coal to the surface and carrying the miners up and down. Vasil'ev was the representative to the trade-union committee. Together they succeeded in having the brigade pass a resolution that henceforth the money allotted to their brigade from the prizes for socialist competition should be allocated by the brigade itself, and not by the administration. The amount was small, some two hundred rubles a month for a brigade of a hundred workers, but it was the principle that was important. Control of these funds and of a dozen similar small funds, as well as control of the allocation of manpower, was the source of a whole system of corruption—the phenomenon of *podsmozbniki*, the infamous 'snowdrops' who have entered the public lexicon since the strike. Large numbers of workers—one source estimated it at up to 30 per cent of the work force<sup>39</sup>—were nominally on the mine payroll, but in fact were used as 'house serfs' to work for the bosses—repairing their houses or even tending their gardens, opening and closing their dachas in accordance with the season, and even doing work for visiting inspectors, as a way of ensuring favourable reports on the mine.<sup>40</sup> The *podsmozbniki* were rewarded for their compliance by being given minor posts and privileges in the elected bodies representing the workers, or as shift bosses or other minor executives. There they served as *gorlopami* ('bawlers'—in the tradition of the hired claquees who swayed the public meetings of medieval Novgorod by shouting down the opposition and cheering for the man who had hired them), supporting their patrons in any discussion.

As for Boldyrev, after attempts to intimidate him had failed he was excluded from the Party and charged with political immaturity, overly hasty application of the slogans of democratization, destroying the morale and discipline of his brigade, and undermining the authority of the administration. He was also transferred to a different section of the mine, far from his brigade and friends. A stubborn campaign reaching to Moscow and the Central Committee resulted in his reinstatement in the Party.<sup>41</sup>

The result of such incidents was, in the Donbass and elsewhere, a total distrust of the local administrative and political stratum—a distrust

---

<sup>38</sup> See O. Yanitskii, 'Otkaz ot shablonov, lomka stereotipov', *Kommunist*, no. 11, 1987, pp. 74–84.

<sup>39</sup> See the interview with mine director Shepelenko in *Sotsialisticheskiĭ Donbass*, 8 August 1989. The figure was suggested by the interviewer. The director's response was that the mine strike committee was investigating the phenomenon.

<sup>40</sup> In addition, the *podsmozbniki* include less corrupt forms such as the football teams or folk ensembles that entertain and represent the enterprise, drawing pay as workers, but concentrating full time on what is ostensibly amateur activity. We are indebted to Professor Schneidman of the University of Toronto's Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures for this observation.

<sup>41</sup> The details may be found in A. Vasil'ev and M. Krans, 'Konflikt: Chto za nim', *Kommunist*, no. 9, 1989, pp. 77–85.

which found expression at all stages of the action. It lay at the root of the strike, and influenced both the way negotiations were conducted and the specific form of settlement. As Vasil'ev and Krans put it in summing up their account of the wrongful persecution of Boldyrev in the Gorky mine: 'The leadership of the mine destroyed the people's faith in *perestroika* and democratization.'<sup>42</sup> A Kuzbass miner quoted in *Pravda* generalized this theme: 'The tragedy is that our own Soviet regime has forgotten about its people. Of itself it is mindful, but not of us.'<sup>43</sup>

### The Miners Gain in Self-Confidence

The leadership was resented, and the workers had no faith in their promises. The first secretary of the Pavlograd *gorhom* was holidaying abroad when the strike broke out, and returned only on 24 July—a week after the strike had started. For the miners, his holiday abroad was a symbol of aristocratic privilege, and his tardy return a gesture of indifference.<sup>44</sup> Even when the Pavlograd leadership negotiated with the strikers, their offers were perceived as 'insincere, unconvincing, and unclear', and the strike continued until the government commission from Moscow came with the central government's authority to sign an agreement. There was apparently good reason for them to be suspicious of their bosses. When a draft agreement was reached after a marathon bargaining session, it was given to the *gorhom* authorities to type up in preparation for signing. In the morning the miners' representatives who came to sign found a quite different document, with several important clauses omitted or changed. After angry questioning, it was admitted that the document 'had been edited to eliminate unnecessary repetitions', but it was never discovered who had authorized and who had actually done the editing. Each official, when questioned, pointed to someone else.<sup>45</sup>

When the Donetsk representatives of the Donbass strike committee went to Moscow to set up a detailed schedule for implementing the agreement that ended the strike, officials in the Central Council of the Trade Unions told them: 'Boys, we've shipped soap and sausage to your district, you can go home!'<sup>46</sup> The speaker who presented this vignette went on to say: 'You see how they put things? And if there should be a different shortage tomorrow, should we rise up again? In fact we were deciding more specific questions of a higher order.'

The miners' response to this crisis of confidence was direct and to the point. When the government commission, led by Politburo member Nikolai Slyunkov, negotiated a protocol of agreement on the demands of the strikers, the strike was duly suspended. Only when the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai Ryzhkov, signed a detailed

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> *Pravda*, 21 August 1989.

<sup>44</sup> See comments in *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta*, no. 32, August 1989, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> S. Naidenov, representative of the Abakumov mine strike committee, speaking at the Donetsk *gorhom* plenary session, *Vecherniy Donetsk*, 16 August 1989.



schedule which made specific institutions responsible for fulfilling the agreement within a fixed period, and it was announced that this agreement had the personal approval of Gorbachev, was the strike officially ended. The delegation that went to negotiate with Ryzhkov included a group of young *Afgantzy* (veterans of the Afghan war) as observers to ensure that there would be no sellout of the strikers' cause. Even this was not enough. On 3 August the Kuzbass strike committee threatened to renew the strike when they found out that construction was continuing at an increased pace on an ecologically harmful hydro-electric complex that, according to the agreement, was supposed to have been phased out.<sup>47</sup>

The miners' success filled them with a sense of civic competence, which found expression in all their meetings and interviews. The Kuibyshev mine strike committee radiated joy, confidence and a sense of new-found empowerment waiting to be tested. A Kuzbass miner exclaimed: 'We feel good; this is the first time we've ever done anything like this.' The strike committee chairman in Prokop'evsk declared it the real beginning of self-management in industry.<sup>48</sup> An all-day meeting of the Kuibyshev and Panfilov mines' delegates was held to hear their trade-union committee's report and to hold new elections. It was notable not only for the ferocity of its attack on the old committee, but for the gravity and attention with which the audience followed the debate, and the seriousness which marked the discussions. There were light moments and there were moments of cruelty—one, when the miners voted to recommend that their former secretary be stripped of his 'Order of Miners' Glory, Third Class'. But the discipline and decorum and the overall atmosphere of scrupulous fairness were notable. Time and again during this period observers commented on the feeling of self-worth and the desire to live in honesty and dignity that informed the miners' aspirations. As one *apparatchik* somewhat ruefully put it: 'They are seeking to put an end to abuses by having public workers' control over distribution of benefits—something at which we have had very limited success.'<sup>49</sup>

This feeling of competence was not restricted to their own immediate concerns, but extended to national affairs as well. E.L. Zvyagil'skii, director of the Zasyadko mine, told the Donetsk *gorkom* plenum: 'I and my miners sent a letter of protest to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet against the nomination of 150 [sic] deputies by public organizations. Elections should be direct.'<sup>50</sup> In every sphere, the conviction grew that the worker should have a direct and clear input into the political system, and that the old system that had proved so corrupt and hypocritical must be radically changed. Alexander Solzhenitsyn

<sup>47</sup> *Izvestiya*, 4 August 1989. In Donetsk too, rumours flew of renewal of the strike because of non-fulfilment of the agreement.

<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, 21 July 1989.

<sup>49</sup> V.A. Zaets, director of organization department of Kiev *railcom* in *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 31 July 1989. Also *Pravda*, 21 August 1989: 'The workers have full faith in the justice of their cause and in their own strength. They know their worth and know how to stand up for their rights and their place in society.'

<sup>50</sup> *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 16 August 1989. The number of deputies elected through the public organizations is 750 and not 150 as the paper printed.

once wrote that the Soviet regime was based on mass lies and hypocrisy, and that if for one day every Soviet citizen refused to lie or to accede to lies, the entire system would collapse. It did not happen in a day, but that is approximately what took place in the miners' strike.

### The Strike Demands

The strike demands themselves were many and varied. The protocol published by *Vechernyi Donetsk* on 23 July contained forty-seven demands. They may be divided into four types. First were those affecting the structure and administration of the coal industry itself. In putting these first, the Donbass coal miners felt they were more radical and militant than the Siberian miners. The second group may be called 'bread and butter' demands. They ranged from pay, vacation, and social-welfare benefits, to improved supply of necessities and better housing, and cost-of-living linkage for wages and benefits. Miners, emerging from the pits black from head to toe, were limited to a ration of 200 grams of washing soap per month. Their claim was that this be increased to 800 grams. The third group of demands touched on work and welfare conditions: medical care, occupational disease, responsibility for safety and accidents, and similar questions. Finally there were demands for protection for worker-activists and for strike leaders. Each delegation added new items and the list expanded almost endlessly. Many of the demands had figured in the workers' complaints and suggestions to the administration and trade unions for years without result.<sup>21</sup> Some were a result of the miners' perception that their occupation had lost standing, and that they were marking time or regressing while other occupations were bettering themselves. One young miner said: 'I'm not a Stalinist of course, but under Stalin miners were the best paid, and the best fed. Today many are leaving the occupation.'<sup>22</sup>

Two demands dealing with the basic organization of the mines and the industry are perhaps the most interesting. The first demand of the Donbass miners was for full legal and economic autonomy for the mines from 1 January 1990. This meant that the Ministry of the Coal Industry in Moscow should have nothing to do with the administration of the mines. (The 1988 Law on State Enterprises was to have given the mines more autonomy, yet a year before the strike a delegate from Karaganda to the Nineteenth Party Conference had complained that this law was ineffective—that all funds were going toward production requirements, with social needs given residual status, and that less than 30 per cent of a firm's earnings was left for its own use.)<sup>23</sup> Nor should the ministry have any say in the mines' budgets. The state would receive 30 per cent of the mines' income as taxes and the remaining 70 per cent would be at the disposal of the mines for amortization, development, wages, social benefits and profits. According to the miners, the proportion today is the reverse. In Donetsk, the city's twenty-one mines would form a single corporation

<sup>21</sup> *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta*, no. 32, August 1989, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Personal communication to one of the authors by G.G.

<sup>23</sup> See the speech of K.Z. Romazanov of Karaganda in *Pravda*, 1 July 1988

to run the entire complex. First steps in this direction have already been taken.

The miners harbour no illusions that they have the necessary education or the experience to handle such complex technical and economic matters. They do, however, expect that among their directors and chief economists competent people can be found. In the first instance, the Soviet state will remain the overwhelming customer for Donetsk coal. Up to now, state orders have accounted for 95 per cent of production. Gosplan has been instructed to reduce this to 90 per cent in the coming year.<sup>54</sup> Some of the miners do exhibit a certain naivety regarding this question of economic independence. A member of the Mezhdurechensk strike committee noted that the Siberian miners were lacking refrigerators. 'They've promised to send meat to the region. Where will we store it? The Japanese want to buy 200,000 tons of coal from our mines. We'll exchange it for refrigerators.'<sup>55</sup> Others are presumably more sophisticated. However, when the director of the Gorky mine went to Japan to negotiate the sale of 300,000 tons of coal, making use of the new freedom of Soviet firms to develop independent import-export relations, he found that the Japanese demands for low ash and low sulphur were far beyond what the Donbass could supply, and he returned without a contract.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the Donetsk miners remain unreservedly determined to develop their experience of commerce, both domestically and internationally, and run their mines without Moscow.

The second fundamental innovation demanded is the introduction of leasing and brigade-contracting as forms of work organization in the mines, allowing the miners closer control over the amount they work and the payment for that work. This was a suggestion put forward by Boldyrev to his lift brigade, which evoked considerable disagreement among technical personnel and economists as to its feasibility. Originally conceived in the field of agriculture, such arrangements have been recommended in the recent amendments to the Law on State Enterprises. They would constitute a powerful tool of decentralization, giving the workers a direct interest in working productively. The system is being tried now in certain sections of the Gorky mine, and the Kuibyshev mine newspaper reprinted a discussion of the question from *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta*.<sup>57</sup>

Although one of the most articulate of the Donetsk strike activists defined his ideological position as one of 'cooperative socialism', the admiration for cooperatives is far from universal. There is no dispute that the advent of clothing cooperatives has transformed the wardrobes of Donetsk women, adding a measure of style and quality obvious to

---

<sup>54</sup> *Vecherniy Donetsk*, 7 August 1989.

<sup>55</sup> *Pravda*, 21 August 1989, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> For the changes in the Law on the State Enterprises giving more economic autonomy, see *Izvestiya*, 12 August 1989. For the unsuccessful export attempt see *Ches' Shakhtera*, 15 August 1989.

<sup>57</sup> See Krans and Vasil'ev, op. cit., pp. 78, 83. The conditions of the leasing and the results are not discussed. Also, *Shakhter'skaya starina*, no. 29 (858), 1 August 1989 for the reprint of V. Rutgaizer's article, 'Two Types of Rental Relations'.

even the most undiscerning eye, and that in every sphere cooperatives have raised quality standards. At the same time, their high prices, translated into a high profit margin in the consumers' eyes, have evoked universal protest. The scapegoat in the system proved to be the commercial, non-producing cooperatives, most of which deal in farm produce purchased in the countryside and sold in the city. The closing of all such cooperatives was the first strike demand to be implemented by the local authorities. On 26 July, amidst rhetoric about the 'justified censure and complaints of the population', and in satisfaction of the miners' demands, the Donetsk *oblast'* soviet passed a decree that no more such trading cooperatives should be registered, and that as of 1 September all such cooperatives should cease activity until the Supreme Soviet amended the law on cooperatives. Until then, no bank credits were to be extended to the existing cooperatives.<sup>58</sup> Even after this decree was published, the newspapers continued to print articles and letters in which existing food shortages were blamed on 'the legalized speculators'.<sup>59</sup>

### Reactions to the Strike

No sector of Soviet life was left unmoved by the coal strike. Although local strikes have become a fairly frequent occurrence in recent years, such a mass chain reaction of publicly discussed labour unrest has not been seen since the start of the 1920s. The first reaction in Donetsk, as the miners filed into the *obkom* square, was fear. A university professor whose apartment overlooked the square told one of us frankly: 'I was simply afraid. When I saw them coming into the square I felt I understood the meaning of the word "revolution"'.<sup>60</sup> As the miners proved their discipline and the strike assumed an orderly form, the square became a lodestone for the curious, who, though prevented from entering the square and mixing with the miners, could meet with each other, observe, exchange views, and argue about the meaning of the phenomenon they were witnessing. Perhaps one of the strike's most remarkable aspects was the absence of any influence by the intelligentsia. Not all the observers were in favour of the strike. There were not a few among the Donetsk intelligentsia, and among retired miners, who still regarded the miners as privileged, and resented their demands for additional wages and benefits. Others saw the strike as a threat to the whole economy and to *perestroika*, accusing the miners of particularist selfishness. Others, however, supported the miners unreservedly, asking 'How much can they be expected to suffer?' Yet, whatever their views, these people were merely observers.

In contrast to the public at large, the Party and union *apparatus* was intimately involved. As local representatives of Moscow, they knew that the ultimate consequences would fall on them, whatever the outcome of the strike. The authorities' first reaction to the outbreak of the strike in Siberia was harshly negative. The idea of bringing in strikebreakers

<sup>58</sup> The decree appeared in *Vestnyy Donetsk*, 1 August 1989. Medical cooperatives are also included under this order.

<sup>59</sup> See for instance the letter in *Sotsialisticheskii Donbass*, 15 August 1989, p. 3, and the comments of the *gorkom* first secretary to the plenum, *Vestnyy Donetsk*, 16 August 1989.

<sup>60</sup> Personal communication from Yu. K.

was considered, but abandoned for fear of 'undesirable incidents'.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, word was sent out to the local Party committees that participation in the strike was incompatible with Party membership, and they were given to understand that the order had originated somewhere higher than the local level.<sup>62</sup> In the Donbass the Party line was also against the strike, with the activists trying to convince the miners that the authorities supported their demands as just, but that to strike was wrong. In some regions this evidently had an effect, for the Krasnoyarsk coal workers' committee sent a telegram of support to Shchadov, the Minister of the Coal Industry, stating that in such troubled economic times even the severest problems should not be settled by striking.<sup>63</sup> However, numerous rank-and-file members were bombarding their Party committees with the demand that the Party must not oppose the strike.<sup>64</sup> The result was confusion and paralysis in many of the local Party organs, preventing them from engaging in any constructive communication with the strike committees.<sup>65</sup>

There were exceptions. From the morning of 18 July, A. Mironenko, secretary of the Dnepropetrovsk *obkom*, was talking with miners, sounding out their mood. Throughout the strike he went from mine to mine, unconcerned about 'dirtying himself', to find out what was really going on.<sup>66</sup> After the strike was over, the first secretary of the *gorkom* in Mezhdurechensk, where the Siberian strike began, was handed a severe reprimand by the *obkom*. The miners were offended at this, claiming: 'He's one of ours. He got his Hero of Socialist Labour down below, cutting coal.'<sup>67</sup> Other local secretaries, however, fared worse. In several Donbass cities, dismissal of the local Party secretary was among the strikers' demands; and, as we shall see later, this demand was met.<sup>68</sup>

We have already noted the trade unions' failure when they attempted to attach themselves to the strike, and this was evidently the fate of many of the local soviet deputies and other dignitaries who were rejected by the strikers as belonging to the local establishment. Others simply assumed an equivocal position. The deputy prosecutor of Donetsk's Kuibyshev district complained at the session of the district committee (*raikom*) that he had been unable to act during the strike because there were 'no orders forthcoming from above'.<sup>69</sup> More serious from the Party's viewpoint was the low profile and lack of influence of all those 'award-winners and Heroes of Socialist Labour

<sup>61</sup> *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 30 (459), 27 July-4 August 1989.

<sup>62</sup> *Pravda*, 21 August 1989.

<sup>63</sup> *Zakharpatsherya Pravda*, 28 July 1989.

<sup>64</sup> Donetsk *obkom* secretary, Vinnik, to plenum, *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 2 August 1989.

<sup>65</sup> Donetsk *gorkom* secretary, Ignatov, to plenum, *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 16 August 1989. Ignatov condemns the mass media for spreading the idea that the Party committees were in confusion, but later in his speech makes precisely this charge himself.

<sup>66</sup> *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta*, no. 32, August 1989, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> *Pravda*, 21 August 1989.

<sup>68</sup> See mention of this in the report of A. Ya. Vinnik to the Donetsk *obkom*, *Sotsialisticheskiy Donbass*, 2 August 1989.

<sup>69</sup> *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 31 July 1989.

who usually crowd the platforms' and who were counted on to be the solid base on which the Party committees could rely.<sup>70</sup> Nor were the elected leaders of the Councils of Labour Collectives active in the strike. Suddenly it was discovered that all these cadres were an illusion: they not only lacked standing in the mining community, but were actively disliked.

### Taking Stock

After the strike, there was a clear difference between the mood of the unions, deep in gloom and confusion and frightened for their future, and the Party bodies, which were gingerly examining their bruises but preparing for the next round. The coal miners' union convened an enlarged plenum of the territorial committee in Donetsk a few days after the strike's end, ostensibly to decide how to implement the agreements reached between the government and the miners. The tenor of the meeting was one of bewildered self-criticism. 'In the strike, as in their everyday work, the union committees displayed indecision, incompetence, political inadequacy, and a cosy reliance on management.'<sup>71</sup> Some justified themselves by pointing out that the strike situation was highly unusual, and that they had been left facing it without instructions or guidelines from higher bodies. The most frankly realistic was V.I. Efimov, secretary of the Kuibyshev mine union committee, who, following a gruelling interrogation that accused him of bureaucratic behaviour, corruption, indolence, and favouritism, admitted: 'Yes, the strike is over. The train has pulled out of the station and we are left standing on the platform. Our trade-union officials turned out to be totally unprepared for any such extreme situation. The people launched their attack and charged right by us, and we were left dragging soup kitchens after them. The strike committees are right to declare that they have no faith in us.' To this statement, one of his colleagues from the Kalmyus mine added, 'If we have any honour whatsoever, we'll all resign voluntarily, as having failed at our task.'<sup>72</sup>

A short time later, an *oblast'* trade-union conference took a broader view of the situation and began looking for new forms of organization and work.<sup>73</sup> This was no simple matter, for while the official report to the conference stated that the miners' strike provided a shock that finally made the unions take a new look at their functions, one of the delegates warned that the Central Council of the Trade Unions was already trying to reimpose the old practices and style. 'If we don't revive the function of protecting the workers, then other structures will arise to do this, taking our place.' As though to emphasize these words, the meeting was introduced to V.F. Luchkov, who presented

---

<sup>70</sup> See the comments of the Kuibyshev *nachalnik* secretary, Butov, *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 31 July 1989, and of A. Ya. Vinnik, *ibid.*, 16 August 1989. The fact that this criticism is to be found at all levels testifies to the seriousness and epidemic nature of the phenomenon.

<sup>71</sup> Protocols of the meeting appeared in *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 1 August 1989.

<sup>72</sup> The miners at Efimov's mine repeatedly pointed to this confession as a basis for justifying his dismissal a week later.

<sup>73</sup> Protocols of this plenum appeared in *Sotsialisticheskiy Donbass*, 12 August 1989.

himself as a delegate of The United All-Union Central Committee of Free Trade Unions. Claiming that his organization had been in existence for ten years, he asked the plenum for official recognition.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the Donbass miners appear to have no intention of founding an alternative system of trade unions, but fully intend to purge and reactivate the existing system.

The Party authorities' response showed an increasing sensitivity to reality the closer they were to the grass roots. The *obkom* plenum on 31 July was held in the presence of an *instruktor* from the Central Committee in Moscow and another from Kiev. The first secretary, who must have seen his tenure endangered by the strike, ventured little further than the comments that had appeared in the central and republican press. The bulk of his remarks and exhortations were directed at the lower levels, with criticism far outweighing self-criticism. His speech was also phrased in the by then standard language of new thinking: overcoming remnants of the command-administrative system, and accelerating the tempo of restructuring. His principal points of reference were the resolutions made at the centre, such as that of advancing the Party's report and election meetings, and preparing for early elections to the soviets.

The report of the Donetsk *gorkom* secretary to that body's plenum focused far more on the strike itself and the Party's performance during the strike.<sup>75</sup> 'Our greatest tactical error was in trying to prevent the strike when we should have been leading it. We all supported the miners' demands. I suppose we were afraid of what the higher echelons would say. That's the old style of thinking dominating us.' Ignatov had apparently liberated himself from fearing what *verkhushka* (superiors) would say. He complained: 'Both Communists and non-Party people note a rift between the centre and the local organs. We simply do not understand a situation in which the central press and authorities try to lay all blame for failure on the local Party committees.' Thinking ahead to the approaching Party-committee elections, he repeated this theme: 'We must look upward less when choosing our cadres, and pick those whom the collectives have elected.' He also made a point of emphasizing that elected Party officials must enjoy the confidence of both Communists and those not in the Party. In this he put himself in step with Gorbachev's innovation that the Party secretary should serve as chairman of the local soviet, thus compelling him to win a public election campaign, as well as a secret-ballot vote of confidence in the soviet. As will be remembered, a number of high Party officials failed this test in the elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, and consequently lost their Party positions. Referring to the Spring 1990 elections, Ignatov explicitly called for an increase in 'pluralism of opinion and alternative candidacies'—points

<sup>74</sup> There was no notation in the protocol of any response to this request. The Free Trade Union movement in the *USSR* originated in Donetsk in 1977 with a disgruntled miner named Vladimir Klebanov who was put into a psychiatric hospital for his activities.

<sup>75</sup> References to this plenum use the protocol published in *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 16 August 1989.

ignored by his superior, Vinnik. Apparently, not all Party activists feel able to implement these new values, for in addition to noting the confusion and paralysis that affected certain local Party committees during the strike, Ignatov condemned the tendency of 'individual Party leaders' to passivity and keeping a low profile.

#### After the Strike: The Beginnings of Perestroika from Below

One of the provisions in the protocol of agreement signed by the strikers and the government commission was that the situation of 'dual power' created by the emergence of the strike committees was to continue for only two weeks after the end of the strike. In the Donbass, there was no intention of replacing the existing institutions. Activists of both the Kuibyshev and Gorky mines were eager to work within the law and within the existing framework, but to give these institutions the function and content they were meant to have, rather than having them exist as empty shells to front for the *apparat*. In accordance with another of the settlement's provisions, the strike committees were to supervise the election of the new Council of the Workers' Collective (*Sovet trudovogo kollektiva*—STK), a body created by the Statute on the Work Collective some years ago. This statute had given the STK broad oversight powers, including the right to vote confidence or no confidence in any administrative or technical official, up to and including enterprise directors. Before the strike, these bodies had been elected in the old way and had been a sort of senate for 'snowdrops' (*podsmozhnik*). When Boldyrev's appeal against his transfer out of his brigade was considered by the Gorky mine's STK, one of the comments was said to be: 'Let's get rid of him now, otherwise we'll have ten like him next year.' Since the STK was elected by the entire work collective, the strikers' hope was that a democratically elected body would serve the workers honestly, and set the tone for election of other bodies on the same democratic basis. In addition, if an honest STK were to exercise its full statutory rights, including the election and dismissal of all enterprise officials, there was a hope that the workers' life could be improved, and the entire parasitic structure of corruption eliminated. In the Gorky mine, only two of the former sixty-two STK members were re-elected, and twenty-three of the new members were strike committee members. When the new STK held elections for a chairman, there were two candidates: I.V. Baranov of the old STK and Sergei Vasil'ev from the strike committee. Vasil'ev was elected with 58 votes in favour, none against, and 4 abstentions, while Baranov had 4 in favour, 57 against, and 1 abstention.

The Gorky mine's STK formed four commissions: production and technical affairs; economic reform; workers' control; and social questions. This last commission has sub-commissions dealing with veterans; women; youth; and children.<sup>76</sup> After the formation of internal institutions, the first matter of business taken up by the STK was the consideration of candidates for the director's post, in keeping with a resolution of the mine workers' general meeting. Despite the fact that the director had doubled the mine's production in the seven years of his

---

<sup>76</sup> Chert' Shakhbura, 15 August 1989.



incumbency, his management style and preferences were out of step with the times.<sup>77</sup> The Gorky mine, then, was one of those mines in which virtually the entire administration was replaced. At the Kapital'naya mine, too, the three top officials were dismissed by the new STK, and new officials chosen in multi-candidate elections. At other mines the directors were given a vote of confidence, while some of their subordinates were dismissed. In all, one third of the mine directors in Donetsk were sacked.

At times, the purge of administrative officials was said to have gone beyond the bounds of propriety. The newspaper *Sotsialisticheskii Donbass* complained that foremen and other technical personnel who refused to stop work during the strike, devoting themselves to safety and technical maintenance of the mines, were now being dismissed by the workers.<sup>78</sup> Repeatedly in plenary Party and trade-union sessions, we find expressions of anxiety over the strained relations between workers and technical engineering personnel. In the Mushketovo mine, only one mechanic and two foremen were among the forty-two members of the new STK.<sup>79</sup> This class split found expression in Donetsk society even before the strike. In discussing a candidate for the Congress of People's Deputies, a worker remarked: 'He's from a miner's family, and that's good. But he has become an *intelligent*. He's no longer one of ours.'<sup>80</sup>

In a whole series of cases, it was said, directors felt unable to function under workers' control, and resigned their positions. While the delegation from the strike committees was in Moscow negotiating the final agreement to end the strike, a telegram was sent to the Minister of the Coal Industry asking him to issue a decree forbidding the STK from dismissing any official above the position of a mine section chief (*nachal'nik nachalki*).<sup>81</sup> At the Donetsk *gorhom* plenum, the city prosecutor, Litvin, complained that the miners lacked elementary knowledge of the law and were illegally dismissing administrators. One of the members of the initiative committee from the Lidievka mine denied the charge, pointing out that nobody had been discharged from the mine. Some had indeed formerly been in the administration, but they were still employed by the mine in other capacities. The director, described as young and energetic and only two years in the job, was retained at his post. Five others at that mine were dismissed

---

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of the style and record of the manager, Vladimir Prishchep, see Vasil'ev and Krans, op. cit. Prishchep was eventually re-elected as director by a margin of 3,329 to 923 after three other candidates withdrew. The strike committee's last-minute attempt to organize a boycott apparently backfired. For details see T. Gotova, 'Vremya rassudit', *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 14, 15, 16 December 1989.

<sup>78</sup> *Sotsialisticheskii Donbass*, 1 August 1989. This was not the case in the Kapital'naya mine, where the young engineer who convinced the strikers to detail a maintenance and safety crew, and who directed this crew throughout the strike, was later elected to a higher post by the mine's STK.

<sup>79</sup> See the speeches of both Ignatov and Litvin at the Donetsk *gorhom* plenum, *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 16 August 1989.

<sup>80</sup> K. Bobrova, 'Kto vyrazit interesy rabochikh?' *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 4 August 1989.

<sup>81</sup> See the comments in *Sotsialisticheskii Donbass*, 1 August 1989, and the comment in the *gorhom* plenum, regarding the telegram and the fact that such a decree would have violated the law regulating the STK.

from their positions, including the chief engineer. He was replaced by a sixty-two-year-old pensioner who was interviewed and given a vote of confidence by the STK.<sup>82</sup>

### Transforming the Administration

The union committees experienced the same transformation that elections brought to the STK. In the Chelyuskintsev mine, the meeting deemed the previous committee's work unsatisfactory and elected a totally new committee. At the joint meeting of the Kuibyshev and Panfilov mines, the three hundred delegates sat the entire day, first hearing secretary Efimov's report, then disputing it, and then attentively interrogating the candidates for the new committee, carefully eliciting their qualifications and programmes. Only four of the thirty-five members of the old Gorky mine committee were re-elected. Throughout this process one could hear the echo of Ignatov's speech to the *gorkom*: 'Certain Party committees and bureaux, secretaries and trade-union administrators, have lost authority with the people. Some of them compromised themselves by immodesty and abuse of their position.'<sup>83</sup>

The miners' strike resulted in the purging of a whole layer of the lower level Party, union and administrative bureaucracy that was, in effect, the foundation of the silent opposition to *perestroika*. It was a layer that Gorbachev and the Moscow elite could not affect, since it was simply too far removed from them and shielded by too many intervening layers. Relying on the 'snowdrops' and 'bawlers', this stratum drained off energies, and distorted policies, either out of incompetence or from sheer corruption, and thereby perpetuated itself and its kind. Significantly, this entire renovation of the administration was done independent of Party control. The delegates to the union election in the Kuibyshev mine were elected from among the 'firmest, most devoted supporters of the strike'. When asked whether the chairmanship of the union committee was not a post that fell under the *nomenklatura* of the local Party authorities, the chairman of the strike committee simply smiled and said that if the Party authorities had an opinion as to who might be a good candidate for union chairman, they knew where to find the delegates and were free to express that opinion along with all the workers.

From mine directors down to minor union officials, Party criteria for selection of personnel were pushed aside. This is something that Gorbachev had suggested on several occasions, but on which no action had been taken. Elimination of Party control of personnel is the first step toward eliminating the Party's interference in the enterprises' operation. From now on, the Communist Party will have to work to earn its authority among the miners, convincing them of the correctness of policy rather than relying on the threat of sanctions and on its monopolistic control of all institutions. This realization is percolating up from below. In discussing the forthcoming elections to

---

<sup>82</sup> The exchange appears in *Vecherny Dnevnik*, 16 August 1989.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

the local soviets, Ignatov warned his *gorkom* that they would be waging 'a struggle for power, and not simply a contest for a deputy's mandate'.<sup>84</sup>

### Whither the Strike Committees?

While the new *STKs* and union committees have been elected, and the administrations have been reviewed and purged, the strike committees—as noted at the beginning of this article—have not dissolved. At some mines they continue to function as 'workers' committees', suggesting a more or less permanent status that overlaps in many spheres with the competence of the *STK*. At the level of city and district, they are continuing as strike committees. In mid August, representatives of the Voroshilovgrad, Dnepropetrovsk, Donetsk, and Rostov *oblasti* set up a regional union of strike committees of the Donbass, with a coordinating council located in Gorlovka.<sup>85</sup> The job of the regional union and coordinating council is to oversee the implementation of the 47-point agreement, and to inform the miners of any problems. It was this regional strike committee which, at the beginning of November, split 14 against 14 on the question of a proposed warning strike to protest against the non-fulfilment of the July agreement, leaving the Donetsk miners to hold a two-hour strike. Similar action was taken by the Vorkuta and Mezhdurechensk miners.<sup>86</sup> The declaration urges the mines to maintain their strike committees, and calls for the formation of a national union of strike committees. This is likely to prove a controversial subject because the prevailing tendency in the Donbass was to avoid any possible accusation of forming 'a second party' or an alternative trade union of the *Solidarnosc* type. Donbass activists admitted that such thoughts were not uncommon in the Baltic, but they wanted none of them. Such an aversion was not shared in the Kuzbass, where the chairman of the Kemerovo strike committee, Teimuraz Avalyani, spoke openly of the need for a 'fundamentally new type of trade union, maybe alternative trade unions'.<sup>87</sup>

The strike committees are also divided as to what should be the primary direction of their work. The chief division is between 'economists', who see the bread-and-butter issues of miners' welfare as the central object of their activity, and 'politicals', who believe that only a rapid general advance in the process of *perestroika* will guarantee that the old guard will not wipe out all the miners' gains. Yurii Boldyrev, one of the active 'politicals', campaigned for every mine section to pass a vote of support for Gdlyan and Ivanov, the two militia detectives who had come up against fierce opposition because of their work in uncovering corruption and their accusations against members of the *nomenklatura*. Boldyrev was also in favour of an active link with the Inter-Regional Deputies Group of the Congress of People's Deputies,

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> The authors have a hand-written copy of the announcement that was drafted by those attending the meeting. It was explained that although Donetsk is the main centre of the coal industry, the people heading the Donetsk city strike committee are weak and unambitious, and therefore the centre of activity is now Gorlovka. The explanation says something about the internal politics of the strike committees.

<sup>86</sup> See the *Washington Post*, 2 November 1989, p. A39.

<sup>87</sup> *Moskovskii novosti*, no. 32, 6 August 1989, p. 8.

and with Boris Yeltsin in particular.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, a host of different groups' representatives would be happy to add their own particular political dimension to the miners' activities. During the strike, the Democratic Union, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, *Rukh* (the Ukrainian Popular Front), and representatives of groups from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Lvov were all active in the Donbass, but 'the miners dealt them a decisive rebuff'.<sup>89</sup>

The strike created numerous tensions in Donbass society. Firstly, it did not go unnoticed among other groups of workers. In the metallurgical industry, workers' initiative groups were formed and began to draw up demands. Their roots lay in the workers' discontent over the functioning of their STKs, as well as in the example of the coal mines. On 1 August a brief technical stoppage in one shop of the Khartsisk cable and steel factory turned into a warning strike by the workers of the wire shop. They were mostly women who suffered from excessive noise, dust that caused respiratory illness, miscalculated work norms, and a host of other poor working conditions. Here the Party showed that the lessons of the strike had been learned, and Party committees immediately adopted and pushed the demands. The workers presented no less than eight hundred separate grievances.<sup>90</sup> Only in one metallurgical complex, in Enakievo, was a strike committee actually formed. The factory director, Yurii Borisov, met with the committee and recognized its demands as just, but asked them to recognize the limitations of the enterprise: 'The people's demands are justified and legitimate, that is clear. But the truth is also that over the years the savings at the people's expense have created a debt so huge that to pay it in one lump sum is impossible. You cannot give to some without taking away from others, no matter which way the demands are put.'<sup>91</sup>

Initiative groups sprang up in the chemical industry and also in the coke plants, and strike committees were formed by metro workers in Moscow, Kharkov and Minsk.<sup>92</sup> In other localities the strike weapon was used in ethnic conflict, as Russian workers in Estonia struck against a law restricting the franchise, and Azerbaijani railwaymen stopped the movement of trains into Armenia. It was in this context that the Supreme Soviet resolved to hasten its consideration of a new strike law, and Mikhail Gorbachev prevailed upon the legislature to impose a fifteen-month ban on strikes. While permitting strikes in many sectors of the economy, this legislation mandated a cooling-off period and the submission of labour disputes to arbitration. At the same time, the new law, adopted by an overwhelming majority in

---

<sup>88</sup> In an interview with the authors, Boldyrev cited an old Russian proverb to explain his attitude toward Yeltsin: 'When there are no fish, a crab is a fish.'

<sup>89</sup> *Vechernyi Donetsk*, 2 August 1989; 16 August 1989. Similar phenomena were observed in Siberia, where a young Moscow 'journalist', Efim Ostrovskii, busied himself distributing the programme of the 'New Socialist Party of Russia'. See *Pravda*, 21 August 1989.

<sup>90</sup> *Sotsialisticheski Donbass*, 15 August 1989.

<sup>91</sup> *Izvestiya*, 31 July 1989. The Enakievo strike committee presented management with a list of 700 grievances.

<sup>92</sup> *Moskovskie novosti*, no. 38, 1989, p. 14.

early October, banned such actions in mining, railway transport and other sectors deemed vital to the national interest. Appropriately enough, miners from Vorkuta in the far north were the first to violate the prohibition, walking out in November in protest against the government's failure to honour its promises.

### The Strike in Perspective

The miners' strike was a significant event in the history of Soviet industrial relations. Ever since the October Revolution, but especially since the industrialization drive of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Soviet political culture has been marked by a strong productivist ethos, according to which the deliberate withdrawal of productive labour was tantamount to sabotage. In striking, the miners were technically committing an illegal act, but more importantly they were going against the grain of over seventy years of political culture. Before the strike, the disposition of Soviet workers toward economic reform, toward the process of *perestroika*, was one of the blank spots of contemporary public discourse. It was supposed by many observers that workers regarded *perestroika* with a good deal of scepticism, if not apprehension. It was thought that schemes advanced by some of Gorbachev's more radical economic advisers for the dismantling of the administrative-command system and the marketization of price and wage structures were felt by workers to threaten their security of employment and their benefits package. Consequently, if faced with a choice between the flawed existing system and that advocated by Shmelev, Shatalin and others, few would opt for the latter. These assumptions were not wrong, but the conclusion drawn from them—that workers were a conservative force—was incorrect. It was incorrect because it failed to allow for the possibility of a third option, what we have called '*perestroika* from below'. The strike and the pressure exerted by the strike committees since July 1989 has not so much accelerated the pace of *perestroika* as redefined its meaning and boundaries, adding a democratic component that was little in evidence in the economic sphere. 'Industrial democracy', a concept advanced by Nikolai Bukharin during the trade-union debate of 1920, but dismissed by Lenin and buried thereafter, has resurfaced as a result of the strike. No less than marketization, it poses a direct challenge to the administrative-command structure, being both a means and an end.

Yet, it would not do to exaggerate the miners' victory. Clearly caught off guard by the strike, both central and provincial authorities have since developed a new vigilance. Throughout the autumn they waged a concerted effort to isolate the miners, pointing out that the cost of the settlement—four billion rubles—could not easily be absorbed by a state already suffering from a budgetary deficit, and warning that the 'coal debt' threatened to keep plants idle and apartments cold during the winter.<sup>93</sup> With the assertion by a kolkhoz chairman from the

---

<sup>93</sup> *Pravda*, 22 August 1989; 2 October 1989; 19 November 1989; *Soyuz*, 12 March 1990, p. 3. The same arguments have been used to try to head off a threatened strike among the 70,000 oil workers whose working and living conditions most closely resemble those of the miners. See *Moskovskii novosti*, no. 13, 1990, pp. 8–9.

Pavlograd region that 'our labour is not easier, but more difficult than the miners' ... but they have privileges and we have none', the attitude of the public as expressed in the Soviet press would seem to have come full circle.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the miners seem to be catching it from both sides. On the one hand, their payoff is cited as having worsened the economic crisis, and on the other, the government has been dragging its feet over fulfilling the 4 August agreement.

- Nor do the miners' woes end there. Decades of undercapitalization have resulted in a per-capita rate of productivity estimated as one-seventh that of US miners. Carelessness in the siting of processing plants and the disposal of wastes has produced an ecological nightmare. Democratization of the industry, coupled with access to foreign currency, can go some way toward alleviating these problems, but only some way. Finally, notwithstanding the political orientation of some in the strike-committee leadership, the movement remains overwhelmingly trade-unionist—that is, sectoral. Unless miners forge links with workers in other industries and further develop their new-found sense of civic competence, they will be outmanoeuvred by the forces of rationalization, and their victory will have been short-lived.

Nevertheless, in the Donbass at least, the strike committees are holding their own. Twice in February, the Donetsk city strike committee was able to bring out large crowds calling for the ousting of the entire Party *obkom*. In March, nearly all *gorboms* and *obkom* secretaries were defeated in the local soviet elections. And in April, Gorbachev's Presidential Council, fearful of igniting a new wave of strikes, postponed implementation of Polish-style shock therapy for the Soviet economy. Meanwhile, a *Pravda* correspondent labelled Boldyrev and other 'colourful figures' from the strike movement 'destructive', while characterizing Boldyrev's boss and former antagonist, Prishchep, as one of the 'talented people' who should be regarded as candidates for leadership positions.<sup>95</sup> The struggle goes on.

---

<sup>94</sup> *Pravda*, 8 October 1989, p. 2. While insisting that they would not resort to a strike, the *kollektivists* sent an 'ultimatum' to the Supreme Soviet on 1 September, threatening that they would not sell their produce to the state without a revision of prices.

<sup>95</sup> Communication from V.N., *Pravda*, 2 April 1990.

## Murder and Progress in Modern Siam

In 1983, one of the biggest box-office hits in Siam was a remarkable film entitled *Mae Puen*. English-language advertisements translated this title as 'The Gunman', but an alternative, probably better, translation would be 'The Gunmen'. For the director invited his audiences to contemplate the contrast between two hired assassins—hero and villain—one working for private enterprise, the other for the state. In an early flashback, the two men are shown as comrades in the 'secret' mercenary army hired by the CIA to fight in Laos in the late 1960s; there they learn to become crack shots with high-powered automatic rifles. In one savage firefight, however, the hero is seriously wounded and then abandoned to the enemy's tender mercies by his cowardly comrade. The story proper of the film is set in contemporary Bangkok, and depicts the subsequent careers of the two protagonists. The hero, one leg badly damaged, officially supports himself by working as a barber; but we are soon shown that he is secretly a highly paid professional killer. His paymasters are wealthy businessmen—and so are his victims.

The villain, on the other hand, has become the head of a high-publicity SWAT team of the Bangkok metropolitan police. He specializes in luring criminals into traps where he shoots them down with icy, pinpoint accuracy. He is known to the mass media as *Mr. Dam* (Black Hand) because he ostentatiously puts a black glove on his gun hand when preparing to kill for his employer, the state. In another society he would be the natural boss of a death squad.

The killers are distinguished morally by what we are shown of their circumstances and motivations. The hero has been abandoned by his wife, and is left to care for his critically ill child all on his own. Murder is his only means of raising the money needed for expensive surgery for the little tyke. The villain kills to compensate for the memory of his earlier cowardice, to gain media attention, and to impress an alcoholic wife, with whom his sexual relations are distinctly sadistic. He thus exploits his position as state-licensed killer to gratify a range of unpleasant private desires. But lest the audience think that the villain is a pathological aberration, the director makes sure to provide him with a young police henchman who takes an even grimmer pleasure in assassination-for-the-state.

It is hard to imagine a film of this sort being made, let alone screened, anywhere else in Southeast Asia. Nor, I think, would it have been possible in Siam except in the 1980s. It is particularly interesting that the Thai police insisted on only two changes in the original print before the film's public release. The hero's main paymaster could not be shown to be a moonlighting senior police officer; and the masked motorcycle gangsters gunned down by Black Hand could not be shown to be young women. On the other hand, there is also something curious about the film's popularity with the public. One can readily understand why young audiences would enjoy the rare filmic spectacle of villainous police. But a hero (even one played by top box-office star Soraphong) who kills 'innocent people' for money? The answer, I suspect, is 'yes,' provided the victims are clearly middle-aged, male and very rich (in other words, big capitalists). Provided, too, that there is some resonance between what is seen on the screen and the contemporary realities of Thai society.

This reality, or rather the part of it with which I am here concerned, is that in the 1980s political killing in Siam has assumed a completely unprecedented character, one which is, oddly enough, probably a positive omen for the future. For it seems tied to the eclipse of a long-standing tradition of military-bureaucratic dictatorship and its supersession by a stable, bourgeois parliamentary political system. To get a sharper focus on the relationship between 'The Gunmen' and the rapidly changing structures of Thai politics, it may be useful to sketch out antecedent patterns of political murder in Siam.

### Early Patterns

The modern era of Siam's history is conventionally said to have begun in 1855. In that year, Sir John Bowring, representative of Queen Victoria and coiner of the immortal axiom 'Free Trade is Jesus Christ



and Jesus Christ is Free Trade', imposed his commercial Divinity by means of a treaty which compelled the Thai state to abolish all substantial barriers to imperialist economic penetration.<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1855, the pattern of political killing was exactly what one would expect in a society where political participation was confined, most of the time, to a very small, largely endogamous, 'feudal' upper class. The victims were typically members of this class—princes, noblemen, courtiers, and high officials—and so, on the whole, were their assassins. If commoner bodyguards or soldiers participated, it was rarely on their own behalf, rather they acted at the behest of their patrons. Political murder was an intra-family affair, pitting fathers against sons, uncles against nephews, half-brothers against half-brothers. Most killings took place in the royal capital itself, which was the only real arena of political competition. The state was still so archaic and so personalized in the ruler himself that there was no sharp conceptual line between execution and murder, between 'state' and 'private' killing.

Between 1855 and 1932 this pattern of intra-upper-class murder went into suspension, most likely because of fear of European intervention in the political sense, and thanks to European intervention in the economic. Political leaders in Bangkok could see that in neighbouring Southeast Asian states, where ruling circles permitted themselves too much fratricidal carnage, European imperialists found easy pretexts for marching in to establish law'n'order or to restore a 'rightful', compliant claimant to the local throne. On the other hand, the rapidly expanding free-trade economy of the last half of the nineteenth century lessened the ferocity of intra-elite competition by enlarging the available pie. (The contrast between Siam's experience and the blood-drenched final decades of the Burmese monarchy, deprived by two Anglo-Burmese wars of more than half its territorial revenue base, is instructive.) These conditions remained sufficiently stable so that even when the old nobility faced political and economic challenges from the 'new men' of the modern-style bureaucracy created by Rama V (reign: 1868–1910), the conflicts were handled without bloodshed.

Something rather like the pre-1855 pattern only began to emerge after 1932, when the would-be absolutist monarchy was overthrown in a bloodless coup plotted by military and civilian commoner civil servants.<sup>2</sup> During the later 1930s, serious assassination attempts were directed against the two paramount military leaders of the coup group, Generals Phahon Phonphayuhasena and 'Plaek' Phibunsongkhram, by members of their own circle; and violent retribution (by 'legal' execution) was exacted by a still significantly 'personal' state. By then, there was no real fear that such killings would precipitate external intervention, as the imperial powers were abandoning even their longstanding extraterritorial rights. At the same time, the inauguration of a constitutional monarchy—and the twentieth-century impossibility of starting a new (say, Phibunsongkhram)

<sup>1</sup> The quotation is drawn from Charles R. Boxer, *The Dutch Southern Empire, 1600–1800*, London 1963, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> The fullest English-language account is in Thawatt Mokaraspong, *History of the Thai Revolution. A Study in Political Behavior*, Bangkok 1972.

dynasty—meant in principle a much wider circle of participants in the struggle for political and economic dominance. The pattern became still clearer in the late 1940s and early 1950s when violent conflict within the residual elements of the 1932 coup group, their followers, and some potential successors, erupted. We may take as characteristic of this period the assassinations, on 3 March 1949, of four former cabinet ministers, all of them civilians hailing from the impoverished northeast, by the ferocious *asawin* ('knights') of Police General Phao Sriyanon.<sup>3</sup> The four victims moved in the same social milieu as Phao; they were killed in the capital, and for nothing to do with class, or even regional, conflict in the wider sense. As in the pre-1855 era, it is almost beside the point to ask whether the murders were committed by the state or by private individuals. Certainly no form of legal process was involved; but even if it had been, we know from the executions of perfectly innocent people in the so-called regicide trials of the period, that legal mechanisms were easily used for private murders.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is also true that the clumsy moves made by Phao and Phibunsongkhram to cover up these murders indicate their awareness of a widened political public in the post World War II world.

### State Killings

As with so much else in modern Thai history, political killing assumed a new character under the despotic regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, installed by coup d'état in October 1958.<sup>5</sup> During his time, the range of victims of political murder expanded outwards and downwards, while the killers became, more unambiguously than before, the state-qua-state and its employees. Illustrations of the change are afforded by the executions in 1958 of five 'notorious' arsonists, in 1961 of two left-wing ex-members of parliament, and in 1962 of an alleged leading Communist.<sup>6</sup> For the victims were completely outside Sarit's elite circle (he had probably never met any of them); all were accused of endangering state security; and the executions were performed in public by acknowledged agents of the state.<sup>7</sup> The real reason for these murders was simply the desire to build up Sarit's image as absolute strongman for a new national audience of

<sup>3</sup> See Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, Bangkok 1989, p. 48, for details.

<sup>4</sup> On 9 June 1946, the 21-year-old king Rama VIII was found shot dead in his bed. The circumstances of his death have never been cleared up. But the Thai military, temporarily sidelined after 1945 because of Allied anger at Phibunsongkhram's wartime alliance with Tokyo, seized on the affair to accuse the civilian government of complicity in the king's alleged murder, and eventually, in late 1947, to overthrow it. The staging of the show trials was managed by General Phao. The fullest account of the king's death (with a substantial exploration of alternative explanations) and the trials is in Rayne Kruger, *The Devil's Discus*, London 1964. This book remains banned in Siam.

<sup>5</sup> The fullest account of the Sarit regime is in Thak Chaloemtiarana's *Thailand*. 'Bronze-throat' Sarit died of cirrhosis of the liver in 1963, but his regime survived until October 1973 under the control of his two chief lieutenants, Field Marshal Thanom Kittakachorn and General Praphat Charusathien.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 193–95, 203–204.

<sup>7</sup> The executions of the 'arsonists' were carried out on Bangkok's vast downtown Pramane Square, in front of the Grand Palace, with the victims lined up against the wall of the imposing Mahathat Buddhist temple.

newspaper readers and radio listeners, and, potentially, voters.<sup>8</sup> In other words, these killings were done in a spirit of public relations, mass-media-style.

The appearance of a mass-media audience for which political murders needed to be staged also meant that certain other political killings had to be kept secret from that audience. A good example of this paradox is the case of the Red Drum (*Tang Drum*) slayings in Pathalung province in 1971–72.<sup>9</sup> These murders, designed to terrorize a local peasant population suspected of Communist sympathies, were not acceptable to a national audience which even the military regime of Sarit's successors felt somewhat constrained to respect. Similarly, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the military regime in October 1973 (see below), student activists were able to expose the locally public, nationally secret Ban Na Sai affair to undermine severely the state security apparatus's legitimacy.<sup>10</sup> A conspicuous gap was opening up between the state as law and the state as apparatus.

### Armed Struggle

The other big change in the era of Sarit, Thanom and Praphat was the emergence of two very important new types of participant in Thai politics. The first of these was the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which after 1965 waged an increasingly successful armed struggle in the state's territorial peripheries.<sup>11</sup> The CPT leaders did not belong to the old capital-city political elite, nor did they attempt to participate directly in capital-city politics. They took very good care to remain out of the reach of the state's executioners. And they carried on their struggle in remote rural areas which traditionally had had next to no political importance, but which now, in an age of territorially defined nation-states, had become accepted by the state as a significant political arena. Because the CPT was successful, in many rural communities, in mobilizing lowland peasants and upland minorities—in effect, getting them to participate in a national struggle for power—these people began to join the ranks of potential victims of political murder. In the early years of the state's counter-

---

<sup>8</sup> On coming to power Sarit abolished the existing constitution, closed down parliament, liquidated political parties and trade unions, arrested hundreds of intellectuals, politicians, and journalists, and established severe censorship. After his death, the iron grip was somewhat relaxed, a provisional constitution created, and (heavily manipulated) elections held.

<sup>9</sup> The victims, some dead, most still alive, were incinerated by the security forces in gasoline-filled, used oil drums. See Norman Peagram, 'Probing the "Red Drum" Atrocities', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 March 1975.

<sup>10</sup> The village of Ban Na Sai, suspected of Communist sympathies, was burned to the ground, and many of the villagers summarily executed. See Marian Mallet, 'Causes and Consequences of the October '76 Coup', in Andrew Turton, Jonathan Fast and Malcolm Caldwell, eds., *Thailand. Roots of Conflict*, London 1976, pp. 80–103, esp. p. 82; and David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand*, Cambridge, Mass. 1981, pp. 169–72.

<sup>11</sup> See Morell and Chai-anan, *Political Conflict*, pp. 80–81, and Patrice de Beer, 'History and Policy of the Communist Party of Thailand', in Turton, Fast, and Caldwell, eds., *Thailand*, pp. 143–94.

insurgency campaigns, violence (including murder) against the rural population remained largely the prerogative of the central state apparatus itself. But as the conflicts deepened and widened, with arms of the CPT attacking not merely official emissaries of the state but also its local private supporters, so a significant 'private enterprise' sector emerged alongside the 'state sector' in the murder field. In the northeast, the north, and the south, vigilante groups, village toughs, moonlighting security personnel, and so on, started to step up their activities. The unprecedented availability of firearms—thanks to American aid to the Thai military and police, as well as to the American 'secret war' in Laos—substantially intensified the level of violence in rural politics.<sup>22</sup> Of particular interest were the sizeable numbers of rural and small-town Thai who were enrolled in paramilitary security units while the American money lasted, but demobilized when this money ran out.<sup>23</sup> Demobilization meant that they were no longer in the employ of the state; but they took back to private life militarized attitudes and terroristic skills which, as we shall see, began to acquire real commercial value in the 1970s. The final point to note in this context is that the CIA's secret army was a *mercenary* army, fully understood as such by its recruits. In this way, one could say that the profession of hired gunman—a profession rather new to Siam—derived directly from America's prosecution of its Indochina War, and was thus political from the start.

### The New Bourgeoisie

The second new participant in Thai politics can be broadly described as an extra-bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Its origins lay in the Sino-Thai merchant and trading communities of Bangkok, Chonburi, Paknam, and a few towns of the prosperous south.<sup>24</sup> In the 1940s and 1950s their numbers were still fairly small, their wealth limited, and their political influence negligible (not least because in many cases the process of assimilation was not yet complete). But by the early 1960s a generation of fully assimilated Sino-Thai was reaching high school and college age, just at the point when the great Vietnam War boom got under way. They arrived in time to take advantage of the huge growth of tertiary education in the 1960s, and of the massive expansion and diversification of employment that the boom engendered.<sup>25</sup>

Never in its history had Siam been so deluged with external economic resources—the result not merely of American capital investment in

---

<sup>22</sup> See Andrew Turton, 'Limits of Ideological Domination and the Formation of Social Consciousness', in Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe, eds., *History and Peasant Consciousness in Southeast Asia*, Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, Senri Ethnological Studies No. 13, 1984, pp. 19–73.

<sup>23</sup> See my 'Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 9:3, July–September 1977, pp. 13–30, in particular p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> The standard works are two books by G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, Ithaca 1957 and *Landlordship and Power in the Chinese Community of Thailand*, Ithaca 1958.

<sup>25</sup> See my 'Withdrawal Symptoms', pp. 14–19, for a detailed discussion of class formation in this period.

military bases and strategic infrastructural development, but also of direct American aid to the Thai regime, and substantial Japanese and American private investment in a low-wage, union-free society. There were three especially notable consequences of the deluge. First, it was by no means wholly concentrated in the metropolitan region, but had a major impact, direct and indirect, on many parts of the northeast, north, and south. Second, it encouraged a stratum of businessmen to emerge who were far less sharply counterposed to the modern bureaucrat than had been the case with the older Sino-Thai merchants. Among its leaders were the proprietors and managers of good hotels, shopping plazas, automobile franchises, insurance companies, and of course banks.<sup>16</sup> These were people who dressed like bureaucrats, lived in the new suburban housing complexes alongside bureaucrats, and dined, partied, shopped and travelled in the same places as bureaucrats. Increasingly, from the 1960s on, they came out of a single common institution—the university. Third, it meshed nicely with the meteoric rise of the Sino-Thai banking system, and indeed was probably the major factor in its rise. These Sino-Thai banks were not elbowed aside by Japanese and American giants. Surely advantaged by the difficulties foreigners faced in mastering the Thai and Chinese languages, to say nothing of their formidable orthographies, the banks moved briskly to develop the domestic capital market. They quickly discovered that, in the age of the boom, there were substantial profits to be made by elaborating their provincial operations. In the early 1960s, far the most imposing edifice in most provincial capitals was the governor's office, symbol of the old bureaucratic domination of Thai social and political life. A decade later, many of these Thai-Edwardian buildings had been completely overshadowed by spectacular glass-concrete-marble structures housing local branches of the great Bangkok banks.

### Emergent Parliamentary Democracy

One needs therefore to look at the rise of the extra-bureaucratic bourgeoisie from two angles. The first, and most familiar, highlights the emergence of a very large number of educated youths (a portion of whom made the National Student Center of Thailand [NSCT] the briefly formidable political force it was in the early 1970s). Already in the late 1960s they could no longer be absorbed into the bureaucracy as earlier university cohorts had been. But they were aware that they were in institutions that had traditionally prepared the new generation of the ruling class for its tasks: thus they felt that they had a natural right to participate politically. In so far as many of them were now coming from the provinces, they expected to exercise that right not merely in Bangkok but wherever in their careers they later ended up. Hence, for the first time in Thai history, arose the real possibility of significant non-bureaucratic mini-intelligentsias in the regions. A second, less familiar, angle focuses on the strengthening (on the basis of bank credit and the general, rapid commercialization of provincial life) of small-town entrepreneurs—some independent, some operating

---

<sup>16</sup> See Sutthi Prasartset, *Thai Business Leaders: Men and Careers in a Developing Economy*, Tokyo 1982.

as agents of metropolitan giants. In most provincial towns people of this type quickly developed incomes, then life styles and status-pretensions, that were competitive with those of locally stationed state officials. Furthermore, since they were not subject to the officials' routine transfer to other locales, they put down strong local roots, social as well as commercial. For these roots to engender local power, it was necessary only that the unity and authority of the central state apparatus, standing behind local officialdom, be substantially compromised.

The historic 'break' came with the popular movement of 1973, which culminated, on 14 October, with the collapse of the Thanom-Prapchat regime.<sup>17</sup> It is true that the duumvirate would not have fallen without high-level factional interventions by the King and by Army Commander General Krit Sivara. But the fact that Krit removed his seniors, not by a coup d'état, but by abetting the activism of students and intellectuals, joined by the popular masses in Bangkok (including segments of the middle and lower-middle classes), signalled his own recognition that the traditional form of 'legitimate politics' was no longer viable. The country had changed too much. Events between 1973 and 1977 showed that even though reactionary groups remained powerful, this recognition was becoming widespread even within the state apparatus, which was thus incapable of acting with its earlier unity of purpose.

What was emerging was that characteristic bourgeois political system we know as parliamentary democracy—the style of regime with which all ambitious, prosperous and self-confident bourgeoisies feel most comfortable, precisely because it maximizes their power and minimizes that of their competitors. If one thinks of 1973 as Siam's 1789, then one can view the entire subsequent period (up to the present) within a single optic—that of the struggle of the bourgeoisie to develop and sustain its new political power (institutionalized in parliamentary forms) against threats from both left and right, the popular sector and the state apparatus. The patterns of political killing over these sixteen years provide good evidence that this optic is a useful one.

#### Period of Consolidation

The period might plausibly be divided into two: 1973–78 and 1978–1989. In the first period, one of great instability and uncertainty, the bourgeoisie, feeling its way, was in an openly contradictory position. On the one hand, it needed the support of the popular sector, ideally channelled mainly through electoral mechanisms, to strengthen its legitimacy and power against military and civilian officialdom: in this struggle, 'democracy' was a domestically powerful and internationally respectable weapon. On the other hand, it also felt the need for the support of the repressive arm of the state apparatus to contain 'popular excesses' in the urban areas, to fight the rising CPT in the countryside, and, given the rapid decline of the American

---

<sup>17</sup> For a good brief account, see Morell and Chai-anan, *Political Conflict*, pp. 146–50

position in Indochina, to defend the nation-state from its new Communist-ruled neighbours to the east.<sup>18</sup> In the second period, the main problem for the bourgeoisie has been fending off the efforts by opportunist and ultrarightist elements in the security bureaucracy who have sought to regain their old dominance by exploiting the 'external threat' and resorting to sham-populist, 'anti-capitalist' public rhetoric.

In the bourgeoisie's successful struggle, the importance of the press should not be underestimated; above all that of the popular newspaper *Thai Rath*, which, with its huge nationwide readership, represents another kind of imagined national community, alongside those conjured up by parliamentary institutions or the Nation-Buddhism-Monarchy shibboleth of the old regime. Most of this press has been, if not explicitly antagonistic to military-bureaucratic pretensions (let alone coups), at least sceptical and suspicious. After all, successful newspapers are large business enterprises, which succeed because they voice, at least to some extent, their readers' aspirations. Correspondingly, the role of the press in this period can be viewed as that of an ally of the new bourgeois political ascendancy. However, of still greater interest is that in this second period the bourgeoisie has become so confident of its power, and so certain of the value of the parliamentary system for the protection of its own interests, that it has proved willing to permit violent internal competition among its own ranks. We have had the extraordinary spectacle in the 1980s of MPs being assassinated, not by Communists or military dictators, but by other MPs or would-be MPs.

Before turning to look more closely at the contrasting patterns of political killing in the two periods, we may remind ourselves again of the reasons why the parliamentary system is so attractive to new middle classes of the current Thai type. In the first place, in the face of domineering civilian and military bureaucracies, it opens up channels to political power in both vertical and horizontal dimensions. To be elected to parliament one does not need to have a university degree, or to have entered in early youth the low rungs of an institutional hierarchy. Femaleness is no longer a fatal political disadvantage. Hence there has been a huge, at least theoretical, increase in vertical social and political mobility for the less educated and non-male. At the same time, in a territorially based electoral system, provinciality is no special handicap, and may even be an advantage. One can be based in Nakhon Sawan and still be a cabinet minister; indeed, it may be that *only* by being solidly based in Nakhon Sawan can one obtain a cabinet seat. Parliament thus gives provincial elites the opportunity to short-circuit the Ministry of the Interior's powerful, territorially based hierarchy, and to make themselves felt, on their own terms, in the metropolitan home base of the bureaucracy itself—Krung Thep Maha Nakhon. Put in more general terms, electorally based parliamentary systems, more than any other type of regime, serve to reduce the power-gap between the provinces and the metropolis: this, of course,

---

<sup>18</sup> Given Siam's massive complicity in the American war effort, the Thai bourgeoisie had good grounds for fearing revenge.

is why they are so attractive to provincial notables.<sup>19</sup> Second, reduction in the power of the bureaucracy tends to weaken the regime of bureaucracy-controlled and protected monopolies, which always works to subordinate the bourgeoisie to the state apparatus. While such monopolies of course benefit particular businessmen or business cliques, they are against the general interest of the class. Third, electoral politics favour bourgeois interests in more narrow, technical ways. Money is crucial for sustained electoral success, and money is precisely the resource with which the bourgeoisie is most amply endowed.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the prestige of electoral politics, if it can be solidly entrenched, serves to delegitimize extra-parliamentary political activity—especially strikes, demonstrations, and popular movements, which the bourgeoisie is less likely to be able to control and may, on occasion, profoundly fear. Finally, it is evident that in countries like Siam, where 'feudal' residues remain strong, especially in rural areas, the position of MP may offer possibilities of becoming far more powerful at the local level than is usually the case in industrial societies. It is thus no accident that the consolidation of the parliamentary system in Siam has coincided with the visible rise of so-called *chao phaw*—mafioso-like politician capitalists who, by the use of violence, political connections, and control of local markets and rackets, become feared provincial bosses.

### Local and National Killings

We may now return to political killings. In the period from late 1974 to the coup of 6 October 1976, the typical victims were middle-class student activists associated with the NSCT, leaders of peasant organizations, trade unionists, and left-wing, muckraking journalists.<sup>21</sup> The murders seem to fall into two broad groups. (1) Local killings—typically of peasant leaders, trade unionists, and journalists who were felt to threaten the power or profits of provincial notables, including landowners, businessmen and corrupt village headmen. Most of these killings were private-enterprise murders, with the gunmen (*mau puen*) hired by these local notables from the Vietnam-era pool of professional assassins, former security guards, moonlighting policemen, and

<sup>19</sup> See the exceptionally detailed, well-informed article by Anek Laothamatas, 'Business and Politics in Thailand: New Patterns of Influence', in *Asian Survey*, 28: 4, April 1988, pp. 451–70. Anek notes that in 1979 only four provinces had local chambers of commerce, but by 1987 all seventy-two provinces had established them. Furthermore, interprovincial alliances of these chambers of commerce have fought with increasing success to expand their influence vis-à-vis the metropolis (both the metropolitan bureaucracy and the capital city big bourgeoisie) using parliamentary channels.

<sup>20</sup> Anek has some striking figures to illustrate this point. In the three cabinets of the 1963–73 period, under military dictators Sarit, Thanom and Praphat, there were precisely two businessmen—less than 4 per cent of the total. In the election-based cabinets of 1975–76 there were thirty-five—roughly 40 per cent. In the aftermath of the 6 October 1976 coup (1976–early 1980) the proportion dropped to 13 per cent. Under the restored election-based parliamentary system of the 1980s (1980–86), it shot up again to almost 44 per cent. Ibid, p. 455.

<sup>21</sup> For a solid discussion, with detailed statistics, of these killings, see Morell and Chai-anan, *Political Conflict*, pp. 225–53.



petty gangsters.<sup>22</sup> (2) National killings. A conspicuous example is the ambush assassination, in Bangkok, of Socialist Party leader Dr. Boonsanong Punyothayan on 28 February 1976. But the periodic assassinations of prominent student leaders, and above all, the massacre that took place at Thammasat University in Bangkok on 6 October 1976 itself, form the general category. These victims threatened no particular private interests. Rather they were regarded as enemies of the state, or were cynically depicted as such for Machiavellian reasons (e.g. to create the atmosphere in which the state apparatus could plausibly reverse the parliamentary tide). Hence the killers were more or less direct agents of this apparatus.<sup>23</sup> The massacre of students at Thammasat University on 6 October is especially useful for showing the difference between category (1) and category (2) murders. For the victims were, many of them, the privileged children of the bourgeoisie itself (one has only to look at the Sino-Thai faces of the students inside Thammasat's gates, any day of the working week, and the Thai-Thai faces of the vendors outside, to sense this). There is very little reason to think that the Thai bourgeoisie wished for these killings—which were replicated nowhere outside the capital city.

The 'national' killings, performed by agents of the state, were thus anti-middle class, and intended to return the political order to what it had been before 14 October 1973. The 'local' killings, performed by private mercenaries, were pro-middle class, and intended to intimidate members of the subaltern classes and their self-appointed tribunes.

### The Collapse of Rural Insurgency

Now it has been plausibly argued that Siam, Thai parliamentary democracy, and/or the Thai middle class benefited from an extraordinary stroke of luck in the collapse of the CPT's rural insurgency as a result of the triangular Cambodia-Vietnam-China war that opened in December 1978. It is true that the Party was gravely damaged by its leadership's decision to remain wholly loyal to Peking's positions. It thereby lost its secure retreats in Laos and Cambodia, its opportunities for training cadres in Vietnam, and even its powerful radio-transmitter in Yunnan. (Prime Minister [General] Kriangsak Chomanan was shrewd enough to see the advantages of cementing close ties with 'Little Bottle' and his henchmen.)<sup>24</sup> But it can also be

<sup>22</sup> Most of the killings were carried out in small towns and villages. Their highly uneven geographical distribution (most were in the north) underscores the absence of the central state-qua-state in the violence.

<sup>23</sup> Most notoriously the so-called Red Gauris, many of them ex-mercenaries from the CIA's 'secret army' in Laos, who operated at the behest of the dominant clique in the ISOC (Internal Security Operations Command) of the armed forces; but also the Village Scouts, right-wing vigilante groups under the aegis of the Palace. See my 'Withdrawal Symptoms', pp. 19–20 and the sources there cited; and Morell and Chai-anan, *Political Conflict*, pp. 241–46.

<sup>24</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the 6 October 1976 coup, an awkward compromise between the Palace and the coup leaders produced an ultrarightist, but civilian, government headed by Supreme Court Justice Thanin Krawichian. Almost exactly one year later, this government was bloodlessly overthrown by General Kriangsak, an unusually skilful military politician. It was Kriangsak's policy to persuade Peking to

argued that the damage was especially severe because the Party was already struggling with the problem of what to do with the hundreds of middle-class youthful activists who fled to its jungle protection in the wake of the bloody 6 October 1976 coup. From a much younger generation, from comfortable homes, well-read and articulate, and with some real experience in national-level legal politics, these activists found it hard to accept many CPT positions automatically; the Party's obtuse response to the crisis of 1978-79 made it almost impossible. Prime Minister Kriangsak was shrewd enough to offer a general amnesty, enabling the activists to come safely home. It is significant that the CPT made little effort to stop them, even though the spectacle of 'massive defections' compounded the severe political damage it had already suffered. All in all, there can be no doubt that the CPT's decline, caused not by the Thai military's battlefield successes, but by international political developments and its own internal haemorrhage, redounded principally to the benefit of the new Thai bourgeoisie. After 1978-79, it faced no serious threats from the left, or from below. By then it was also no longer much alarmed by the presence of Vietnamese troops on the country's eastern border, though the military tried hard to make it so. The bourgeoisie recognized the real limits of Vietnam's power, and Siam's advantages in having the US-China-Japan axis ranged firmly behind it.

But the Cambodia-Vietnam-China fighting erupted well *after* the fall of the post-6 October 1976 right-wing regime of Justice Thanin Kraiwichian, and it is his rise and fall that are really instructive for understanding the changing dynamic of Thai politics in the bourgeois era.

### The Thanin Regime

Thanin himself, a Sino-Thai jurist of eccentric and extremist views,<sup>25</sup> had no political base of his own, and represented no substantial group or institution. His appointment as prime minister reflected the conflict between the Palace and the generals. The royal family, panicked by the recent abolition of the Laotian monarchy to which it was related, wanted a strong anti-Communist, but also a civilian (since it never fully trusted the military). The generals, even more interested in power than in anti-Communism, wanted the installation of one of their own. The Palace initially prevailed, but not for very long. Ridiculous in its rhetoric, so that it soon became popularly referred to as the Clam Cabinet,<sup>26</sup> the Thanin government quickly alienated

<sup>24</sup> (*cont.*)

stop supporting the CPT in exchange for Siam's cooperation in supporting the Khmer Rouge against the invading Vietnamese forces. The deal was publicly sealed when 'Little Bottle' popped up in Bangkok as a distinguished guest at the ordination ceremonies of the Crown Prince. (In Siam, it is customary for most young males to enter the Buddhist monkhood for a short period.)

<sup>25</sup> He had published some doxy books on rape, brainwashing, and the Communist menace.

<sup>26</sup> In an early speech Thanin foolishly compared his government to a tender mollusc needing the protection of the hard, thick shell provided by the military, the Palace, and the proliferating right-wing vigilante groups.

almost everyone by its incompetence and ideological extremism. But its leaders took their historic mission—anti-Communism but *also* civilian supremacy and the rule of (right-wing) law—sufficiently seriously that they did something absolutely unprecedented in modern Thai politics: have a top-ranking general sentenced to death and actually executed. To be sure, General Chalard Hiranairi, leader of an attempted coup in March 1977, had managed to kill a Palace favourite, General Arun Dewathasin, in the course of his brief bid for power, but it is most unlikely that he would have been executed if a true military junta had been in control.<sup>77</sup> Chalard's fate was certainly one factor that helps to explain why General Kriangsak's successful, bloodless coup the following October was advertised from the start as a blow for 'moderation' and as foreshadowing the restoration of at least quasi-parliamentary government. The audience for the advertisement was not merely the United States and Western Europe ('international public opinion'), but also, above all, the Thai bourgeoisie.<sup>78</sup> Kriangsak himself was the first Thai coup leader who took pains to act as kindly, home-loving bourgeois in public. For example, in a splendid *coup de théâtre* he had himself photographed by the press cooking curry at his home for the Bangkok 18 (eighteen students imprisoned since 6 October 1976 on the grave charge of *lèse majesté*). The point in all this is that even before the Indochina imbroglio and the collapse of the CPT, the rise and fall of the Thanin regime attests to the continuing consolidation of bourgeois power in Thai politics.

### MPs and the Gunmen

Finally, we may turn to the very recent past and to the subject matter of 'The Gunmen'. Any reader of the Thai press after 1978 will have been struck by the sudden conspicuousness of stories about *chao phaw* ('Godfathers') and *phu mi itthiphan* ('men of influence'), and also by the new dangerousness of provincial political life. While there have been few cases as spectacular as the assassination of 'Sia' Jaew,<sup>79</sup> the celebrated *chao phaw* of Chonburi, who was ambushed military-style by men driving armoured cars and firing sub-machine-guns, the killing of MPs by 'unknown gunmen' has become commonplace. Next to MPs, nouveau-riche tycoons, big speculators and/or smugglers, judges and so on—local bosses or potential bosses—have been frequent victims. These people appear to have taken the place of peasant leaders and student activists—who are now almost never the objects of attack. There is, however, good reason to think that the killers are more or less the same people, at least the same kind of people, as the murderers of 1974–76: *mau puen*, guns for hire. Their paymasters seem almost invariably to be the victims' fellow-bourgeois political and

<sup>77</sup> This does not exclude the possibility that some generals were content to see the choleric Chalard sped to join his Maker.

<sup>78</sup> The military itself was becoming increasingly aware that in a vastly changed Thai society, dreams of a new Sarit-style army despotism were obsolete.

<sup>79</sup> 'Sia' is a Thaiified version of the Teochiu Chinese word for 'tycoon'. Earlier used only for Sino-Thai (with an ambiguous mixture of contempt and awe), in the last two years it has been increasingly applied, with less contempt and more awe, to rising Thai-Thai tycoons.

business rivals. (The highly uneven territorial distribution of the deaths indicates little or no involvement by the state-qua-state.)

What all these killings suggest is that in the 1980s the institution of MP has achieved solid market value. In other words, not only does being an MP offer substantial opportunities for gaining wealth and power, *but it promises comfortably to do so for the duration*. It may thus be worth one's while to murder one's parliamentary competition—something inconceivable in the 1950s and 1960s, when parliament's power and longevity were very cheaply regarded.

What we are now seeing in Siam is a consolidation of the economic and political circuits created during its 'American period'. An almost uninterrupted thirty-year boom has given the country the most advanced, productive capitalist economy in Southeast Asia (outside the microprincipality of Singapore). The great Bangkok banks have been funnelling once undreamed-of credit to the provinces, funds which are as available for politics and gangsterism as for productive entrepreneurial activities. Competition between the banks, at all levels, means that each has a strong interest in developing political agents and allies. As the financial bankers of many MPs, the banks can exert direct, independent political influence in a way that would be very difficult under a centralized, authoritarian military regime. Furthermore, as the representatives of a national electorate, the parliamentarians as a group veil bank power (and the power of big industrial and commercial conglomerates) with a new aura of legitimacy. This is a real and valuable asset. It can thus provisionally be concluded that most of the echelons of the bourgeoisie—from the multimillionaire bankers of Bangkok to the ambitious small entrepreneurs of the provincial towns—have decided that the parliamentary system is the system that suits them best; and that they now have the confidence to believe that they can maintain this system against all enemies. These enemies still exist—in the military and in the civilian bureaucracy in particular. But they seem in secular decline. For all officialdom's grumbings about 'dark influence'—self-serving propaganda meant to suggest that 'benign influence' is a monopoly of the bureaucracy—it has been gradually accommodating itself to the new system.<sup>30</sup>

It is in this context that the assassinations of MPs by professional gunmen can be read as a historic portent. Parliamentary democracy has little trouble gaining the support of liberal intelligentsias. But they are not sufficient to sustain it. Substantial numbers of ruthless, rich, energetic and competitive people from all over the country must also be willing to invest in the system. That in Siam such people are

---

<sup>30</sup> This is true even of the military. Both coup attempts since Kriangkak's *coup de main* in October 1977 have been fiascos. Their leaders, a group of ambitious colonels loosely referred to as the Young Turks, have never managed to unite the military behind their schemes. It is symptomatic, however, that the 'platform' of the Young Turks claims a mission to save the country not so much from Communism as from greedy mega-capitalists. The gap between these idealists' salaries and the sums required to purchase their palatial suburban homes suggests another reason for their lack of political plausibility.

prepared to kill one another to become MPs, indicates that something really new is now in place.

The film *Mae Puan* reflects this situation. It refuses to side with state murder over private-enterprise murder—and the state is not in a position forcibly to change its mind. It reassures its audiences that the new bourgeois world is profoundly stable. After all, if capitalists are being murdered, their killers are neither Communists, student radicals, nor agents of a police state: merely employees of fellow-capitalists. And there is surely this wholly intended subtext for the defeated left among the viewing masses: at least *some* capitalists are being killed, and by a maimed victim of American imperialism and the unjust social system to boot. A sort of dream revenge for 6 October 1976.

### Postscript

In the course of finishing this article, I received from a Thai student of mine, recently returned to America, a description of a recent assassination, so exemplary and so rich in detail, that I can not resist including it here in somewhat edited form:

At the beginning of April last year Mr Phiphat Rotwanitchakorn (known as 'Sia Huad'), a prominent *chaos phaw* in Chonburi district, southeast of Bangkok, was spectacularly ambushed and slain, along with his driver and his bodyguard (a captain in the local police). He had known for some time that he was targetted for assassination, and almost never left his big, heavily guarded mansion. But on 'Cheng Meng' Day, when Sino-Thai families pay homage to their ancestors, he had been summoned by a close friend and prominent Bangkok banker of the multimillionaire Tejaphaiboons family to attend the rites at the Tejaphaiboons' private cemetery in Chonburi.<sup>34</sup> He felt he had to go because this friend had earlier given him a billion-baht (\$40,000,000) line of credit, enabling him to outbid a rival *chaos phaw*, Kamnan (Commune Head) Poh, for control of a gigantic trade-centre building project in downtown Chonburi. Afraid for his life, 'Sia Huad' called in his brother and several professional gunmen to follow him in another car. He even switched cars on returning from the cemetery, in the hope of eluding his enemies. But the assassins, in three cars, first smashed into and thus blocked his brother's car. Then they pursued him in a wild shooting spree for about five minutes, by which time his car had halted and all three men inside were dead. To make sure of this, however, a limping gunman (not Soraphong???) climbed out of his vehicle, pulling on a mask, and took a close look at the corpses, surrounded by a growing crowd of curious spectators.

'Sia Huad' had begun his career as a small-time enforcer for a local *chaos phaw*. When his boss was murdered, he set up his own gang and

---

<sup>34</sup> The Sino-Thai Tejaphaiboons own the giant Bangkok Metropolitan Bank. Two of the younger-generation Tejaphaiboons, including one who was former chairman of the board of the Mekhong distillery conglomerate, ran successfully for parliament in 1986—the first time that the family had thought it worth putting its sons into electoral politics. Mr Phiphat's friend is known as the 'eighth Sia'—meaning that all his seven elder brothers are also big tycoons.

found a new patron in a local political leader. His youngest sister subsequently married the son of a well-known Chonburi MP, who became a cabinet minister, and 'Sia Huad' himself worked for this man as a 'vote collector' at election time. As his wealth and power grew, so did the number of his enemies. He specialized in land speculation, ordering his gang to use the most ruthless methods to force small peasants owning land in areas scheduled for commercial and industrial development to sell to him dirt-cheap. He was also involved in a successful plot to overthrow a local mayor (also a political boss) and install his own henchmen in the municipal government. The arrogant way in which he and his gang treated the local police earned him many enemies in uniform. So when the powerful Kamnan Poh, angered over being outbid on the trade-centre building project, gave the green light, a lot of people who wanted 'Sia Huad' dead pooled a million baht (\$40,000) and plenty of guns in a united front against him.

About a month after the slayings, the police made several arrests in the case, including some of the dead man's *chao phaw* rivals, some politicians and gunmen, and, most important, four members of the Special Operations Police—allegedly the actual triggermen.<sup>32</sup>

Though no newspaper or magazine dares to say so, it is widely rumoured that the mastermind of the assassination was Kamnan Poh. But who dares touch him now? Just one week after the killings, Kamnan Poh celebrated his victory in the first mayoral election of the newly established Saensuk district (close to the tourist resort of Phattaya) by throwing a party for ten thousand people, including several cabinet ministers from the Social Action Party, other prominent MPs, popular singers, and movie stars. This was a much bigger and splashier affair than the party given by incoming prime minister Chatchai Choonhawan, at about the same time. In response to reporters' questions about the death of 'Sia Huad,' Kamnan Poh replied: 'In Chonburi, bad guys must die.' But probably not as spectacularly as 'Sia Huad'. These days, being killed by gunmen is becoming a class privilege of the bourgeoisie. After all, who will pay gunmen a million baht to slay a poor man?

---

<sup>32</sup> This organization is not under the control of the national police department, but is a special paramilitary unit under the supervision of the armed forces. It was originally created as part of the anti-CRT counterinsurgency campaign.

## *What is This Thing Called Chaos?*

It is difficult for professional scientists,  
much less the general public, to distinguish  
excessive hype from solid scientific  
achievement. Chaos has given us both.

John Franks<sup>1</sup>

There is currently a great deal of excitement about the notion of chaos. Science writer James Gleick's book on the subject has become a bestseller,<sup>2</sup> there have been numerous articles in the general press and programmes on television, and *New Scientist* ran an extensive series of weekly articles on the relevance of chaos theory to a range of disciplines.<sup>3</sup> Terms from chaos theory, such as 'butterfly effect' and 'strange attractor', have entered the common vocabulary, though not always used very precisely. While not without precedent, this is an unusual situation for a subject that is concerned first and foremost with developments in mathematics, some of which are, in fact, of fairly mature vintage. Moreover, the connection between the mathematical formalism of chaos theory and events in the real world is considerably more problematic than is often implied in general expositions. Gleick's book, for example, asserts such connections far too glibly, glossing over the complex relations between theory, model and real system. His claim that chaos theory is the new paradigm for science should, at least at this stage, be

viewed with considerable caution. In his treatment, the borderline between mathematics and real systems becomes blurred, to say the least, while the mathematical content of the new developments remains somewhat obscure. What Gleick presents is a tale of discovery, emphasizing individual achievements, and on that level his book is a very good read. A mathematically more serious treatment of the subject is presented by Ian Stewart in his study *Does God Play Dice?*<sup>4</sup>

The new notion of chaos is only one of the results to have emerged from recent developments in nonlinear dynamical systems theory. The basic idea is quite simple: that a good proportion of simple deterministic systems are, at least in theory, capable of producing extremely complex and to all intents and purposes unpredictable behaviour. Chaos in this context is deterministic disorder. There is, moreover, a great deal of evidence that similar forms of behaviour occur in a wide variety of real systems. The surprise has been the realization that complex and irregular behaviour in real systems need not reflect a parallel complexity in the nature of the system itself.

This article aims to present an intuitive picture of how simple systems can give rise to chaotic behaviour, by discussing briefly some of the new developments in nonlinear dynamical systems theory, including their background and potential implications. To keep ideas clear and non-contentious, the discussion will be confined primarily to the exact sciences. In principle, however, these developments could have an important bearing on the many fields where the origin of complex behaviour is under study—especially where notions of what is scientific are informed by developments in physics.

### Definitions, Principles and Methods

It is now thought that examples of nonlinear dynamical systems are all around us: waterfalls, biological organs, ecosystems, the biosphere as a whole, socio-economic systems, the Earth's climatic system, the solar system, and so on. Nonlinear dynamical systems theory is concerned with the construction of mathematical models of such systems and with the investigation of the properties of the models. These properties are taken to provide insights into the behaviour of the real systems represented by the models. In order to keep clear the distinction between real system and mathematical model, it is necessary to examine the definition of certain terms used in nonlinear dynamical

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from mathematician John Frank's (critical) review of James Gleick's book (see note 2). The review appeared, with a reply from Gleick and counter-reply, in *The Mathematical Intelligencer*, vol. 11, 1989, pp. 65–69.

<sup>2</sup> James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science*, New York 1987.

<sup>3</sup> The series began with an article by Ian Percival entitled 'Chaos: A Science for the Real World', *New Scientist*, vol. 124, 1989, pp. 42–47. (The claim of the title seems somewhat premature.) Subsequent articles dealt with mathematical aspects of chaos and with the dynamics of fluids, the weather, the solar system, chemical reactions, and living systems.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Stewart, *Does God Play Dice?*, Oxford 1989. Although not forbiddingly technical, this book is not for the mathematically squeamish. Readers should also be prepared for the author's rather irritating lapses into a forced 'jolly' style.



systems theory. Furthermore, a focus on the restrictive assumptions underlying these definitions should highlight the limitations in the domain of relevance of the new developments.

In general, the term *system* is taken to mean anything that has parts and can at the same time be treated as a single whole. In dynamical systems theory, however, the term is also used in a more restricted sense, referring to the set (system) of mathematical equations used to describe the (real) system. In other words, the mathematical model itself is generally called a (dynamical) system. This point deserves to be stressed, as it is a source of much confusion.

A system is said to be *dynamical* if its state (or mode of behaviour) changes with time. The state of a system can be represented by a number of quantities which, in a dynamical system, vary with time. The minimum number of such quantities (called *variables*) necessary to characterize the system is called the *dimension* of the system. Consider, for example, an isolated habitat where populations of three different species of organism interact. The dynamical system consisting of the three populations (assuming it is closed) would be represented by a set of exactly three equations. Each of these equations would relate the rate of change in one of the variable quantities (that is, the level of one of the populations) to some combination of the other quantities. In this example, three interdependent variables are involved, so the dimension of the system is three. In general, systems represented in terms of  $n$  interdependent variables are said to have dimension  $n$ , where  $n$  is any number.

A dynamical system is called *simple* if its dimension,  $n$ , is small. Of course 'small' is a vague term, and what counts as small depends on the theoretical context. For the present purpose, it suffices to say that three is small enough: a three-dimensional nonlinear system is both simple and capable of generating chaotic behaviour, as will be discussed later.

The rate of change of each variable of a system is expressed in terms of a mathematical equation which may be *linear* or *nonlinear*. If even one of the equations expressing the interrelationships among the system's variables is nonlinear, then the system itself is called *nonlinear*. *Linear* equations have the property that any solution added to another solution produces a third solution; a set of linear equations allows us to construct solutions as the sum of simpler solutions. Historically, linear equations have been the dominant theme in pure and applied mathematics. Linear equations are not only manageable mathematically, their application in physics has also produced enormous richness. For example, very complex wave motions, such as those produced in interference phenomena, can be analysed as the sum of a set of superimposed simple wave motions. For these reasons, the mathematical theory of physics, from Newtonian to quantum mechanics, was, until recently, developed almost exclusively in terms of linear equations.

*Nonlinear* equations, on the other hand, are much more difficult to deal with. They do not have the simple additive property that allows

solutions to be constructed in a general way. In the case of nonlinear equations expressing rates of change, no general formula exists for arriving at solutions for successive points in time. The use of powerful computers has been an invaluable aid for mathematicians dealing with nonlinear equations. Solutions must still be computed in a piecemeal fashion, but this work is at least done very much faster; consequently the quantitative and qualitative properties of whole series of solutions can now be investigated more easily. Moreover, the results can be displayed graphically. In this regard, the recent explorations of nonlinear mathematics owe a great deal to the computer revolution.

Finally, a word about *determinism*. Recall that dynamical systems may be represented as a set of equations relating the rate of change of each of the variables to some combination of the other variables. Such systems are called *deterministic* (in the sense of Laplacean determinism) because, given precise starting conditions, they have the important property of ensuring the existence of unique solutions as their outcomes. It should be noted, however, that this determinism is a property of the mathematical system, of the model. (If Newtonian mechanics were both true and universal, as Laplace thought, then the universe itself would be deterministic.)

### Modelling Real Systems

Before going further, it should be understood that the construction of mathematical models of real systems involves important simplifications, which could have enormous consequences for our understanding of real dynamical systems. In general, models are theoretical constructs which, on the one hand, are intended to capture key features of real systems and, on the other hand, represent special articulations of general theories. The mathematical structure of a model is selected not by the arbitrary fitting of equations to empirical data, but under the guidance of theory. The construction of a model anchored in a background theory typically involves various approximations or simplifications of the theory. For example, Newton's laws of motion cannot be solved precisely for systems consisting of more than two bodies; models of such systems therefore involve approximations of the theory.

If a model is to explain anything about the real world, it also requires a physical interpretation, which again is guided by background theory. This interpretation may be a highly idealized one—physics made great strides by using concepts such as point masses, frictionless media, ideal gases, and so on. Systematic investigations of the effects of perturbing factors like friction may allow such factors to be incorporated as terms in the equations of the model, thus making the model more realistic. What is important is that any alteration in the equations should have some theoretical justification. It may well be fruitful to construct nonlinear models of the spread of influenza epidemics, but the equations should express our understanding of the underlying mechanisms, and the terms in the equation should represent factors that we have good reason to think are involved in these mechanisms. The construction of good realistic models is by no means a trivial task.

In practice, when modelling real systems, it is usually easy to tell if a system is dynamic or not, but to say precisely what the system consists of is often not so straightforward. The difficulty arises in (at least) two forms. First, real systems are always to some extent open, in the sense that their boundaries are not well defined. Take the climatic system for example. Should the outer boundaries of the system be taken to be the top of the atmosphere and the bottom of the oceans? Or should they be set so as to include solar-terrestrial interactions or even galactic influences on the one hand, or factors such as volcanic activity on the other? It is also important to know which changes generated from within the system need to be taken into account—for instance, those changes resulting from human activity. Increases in the carbon-dioxide content of the atmosphere, depletion of the ozone layer and local generation of excess heat in major cities could all have an impact on the climate. Obviously our understanding of the future (and past) behaviour of the climate could be seriously deficient unless the system is characterized in such a way that it encompasses all factors that have a significant influence on its behaviour. The second difficulty in defining a dynamical system is that it might be so complicated internally as to defy a precise characterization. Important but highly problematic examples of this kind are the evolutionary biological system and the human social system. (It is of course open to question whether one should even attempt to treat social systems as being subject primarily to the workings of the laws of nature, and thereby to ignore not only intentionality in human behaviour but also the degree to which social laws are subject to human control.)

Dynamical systems theory attempts to overcome these difficulties by treating any system as closed—that is, as a well-defined, self-contained whole—and as simple enough to allow it to be modelled. The models employed are systems of equations of the type introduced earlier, with arbitrary numbers of dimensions. It is the aim of nonlinear dynamical systems theory to study the general properties of the typical solutions of such systems. Now, given the restrictions mentioned above, the theory might appear unduly limiting and hence irrelevant for the study of real systems. In fact this is not the case. When given appropriate concrete interpretations, a number of the formal properties of the mathematical models employed do appear to mimic certain behavioural features of a wide variety of real systems.

### The Theory in Development

Before discussing some of the new developments, it is worth pointing out that they are not all really that new. As long ago as the turn of the century, Henri Poincaré had some idea about the possibility of irregular motion in simple deterministic systems, resulting from his studies concerning the stability of the solar system. And almost thirty years ago Edward Lorenz<sup>3</sup> at MIT constructed a very simple computer

---

<sup>3</sup> Lorenz presented a simplified model of atmospheric convection consisting of three differential equations. Exploring this model on his computer, he observed all the hallmarks of chaos. Lorenz published his results in the *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences*, vol. 20, 1963, pp. 130–41.

model of weather patterns, which displayed chaotic behaviour. And the polished hard theory was essentially complete by the mid 1960s. Historians will have to consider why chaos did not have a wider appeal until recently.

A brief survey of developments in nonlinear dynamical systems theory should, therefore, begin with the pioneering contributions of Poincaré. Previously the emphasis had been on the study of single solutions of dynamical systems (in the mathematical sense) produced by considering a single set of starting conditions. Poincaré, however, studied a whole family of solutions of a system with the aim of understanding the system's typical forms of behaviour for a variety of starting conditions. This initiative led to an important new way of looking at the qualitative behaviour of dynamical systems. Further important developments followed through the studies of Birkhoff and others in the United States, and Pontryagin, Andronov and others in the Soviet Union. It is of interest that influential abstract mathematical concepts such as that of structural stability (which makes precise the idea that the qualitative behaviour of dynamical systems should remain unchanged under small perturbations) were the outcome of a close collaboration between mathematicians (in this case Pontryagin) and engineers.

The original aims behind the development of such ideas were far removed from a concern with chaos. Indeed, the main interest was in the study of two-dimensional systems (in the sense defined above). One important result of these early investigations was the realization that dynamical systems with dimension two or less, if they are to have finite solutions, are only capable of producing either equilibrium states or oscillatory (periodic) types of behaviour. These are examples of simple forms of behaviour. It was then assumed—erroneously as it turns out—that systems of higher dimensions would display similarly simple types of behaviour. As a consequence, irregular forms of motion were perceived as being the result of a combination of a large set of simple, regular motions. In fact, such a view was advocated, at least in physics, as a means of understanding the origin of turbulence, for instance in fluid dynamics. The change in a liquid (or a gas), upon perturbation, from a smooth flow to a highly irregular turbulent one, was widely seen as the outcome of competing rhythms of movement displayed by a huge—effectively infinite—number of components. According to this view, each component of the system behaves in a simple, regular fashion, but the complexity of the system renders turbulent behaviour in practice unpredictable. The possibility that simple systems might produce similarly irregular behaviour was not considered until much later.

Interestingly, these same ideas, developed for the study of two-dimensional systems with simple modes of behaviour, inadvertently became instrumental in the understanding of complex, irregular behaviour, nowadays referred to as chaos. The breakthroughs—the culmination of a great deal of earlier work—occurred in the early 1950s with the work of Kolmogorov in Moscow and, later, Smale and others in the United States. One important new idea posited that

chaotic, random-like behaviour becomes possible at the moment we consider nonlinear systems of three or more dimensions. To understand this idea, at least intuitively, it is instructive to look first at non-chaotic, regular systems.

It will be recalled that, by definition, the future outcomes of deterministic systems depend uniquely on their starting conditions. On the face of it this seems to imply that the outcomes of such systems, no matter how complicated, would be completely predictable and hence non-random. The problem, however, is that in practice the initial conditions can never be specified precisely, since perturbations ('noise') and errors of measurement are unavoidable factors in dealing with real systems. This lack of precise knowledge about the initial state of the system turns out not to matter much for systems of dimension less than three, because by their nature they cannot magnify exponentially the errors made in specifying their starting conditions and *at the same time* have finite solutions. As a result, we can say that small initial errors lead to small final errors (the classical Laplacean situation) and hence such errors are not of crucial importance in the study of these systems. Their behaviour remains, at least approximately, predictable.

### Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions

An important aspect of the breakthrough has been to show that systems of three or more dimensions can have the property of sensitive dependence on initial conditions. That is, small errors made in specifying the initial state of such a system are magnified exponentially. (This is commonly referred to metaphorically as the 'butterfly effect', after Lorenz's suggestion that a butterfly flapping its wings and perturbing the air slightly in Brazil may, by a chain reaction, set off a tornado in Texas several weeks later.) As a result, errors, no matter how small, will grow rapidly and dominate the future behaviour of the system. Consequently, such systems may be said to 'forget' their pasts, in the sense that their subsequent behaviour is not determined by their past as it was originally specified. Hence, the slightest ignorance about the state of the system at any one time will make prediction of its future behaviour impossible.

It might be objected that some form of sensitive dependence on initial conditions has long been known as a property of real systems of whatever dimension. At certain critical points changes in quantity can become changes of quality—this is hardly a new insight (even in physics!). Gradually increasing the load on a wire will make the wire stretch gradually, until it suddenly snaps. Again, in the classical Malthusian scenario of limitless growth of a given population at a steady rate, an error in the original estimate of the rate of growth will be magnified exponentially; consequently any predictions of population size for succeeding times will diverge further and further from the actual population sizes.

The point is that in this kind of situation any deviations that grow exponentially will be amplified indefinitely in the same direction, either until the system runs down and 'dies' (as in the case of the

wire), or to infinity (as in the Malthusian case). What is different about nonlinear systems of three or more dimensions is that this type of behaviour can remain bounded. Feedback mechanisms can constrain the effects of perturbations so that they do not blow up to infinity. Metaphorically speaking, the system turns back onto itself—it stretches and folds like a baker's dough. In so doing, the system can go through extremely complicated behaviour.

### The Lure of the Attractor

An alternative way of perceiving these new results is in terms of so-called 'attractors'. Roughly speaking, attractors may be looked upon as dynamical states towards which the system tends, regardless of its starting point, after it has had sufficient time to 'settle down'. A very simple example would be a bowl of water sitting still on a horizontal surface. Left alone, this system remains in equilibrium. Once the bowl is disturbed (that is, given different starting conditions), the water will become agitated, but in time will settle down ('get attracted') to the original equilibrium by dissipating the energy imparted by the perturbation. The attractor for this system corresponds to the equilibrium state.

In general, there are three main classes of behaviour that a dynamical system may tend to: (1) the unchanging (equilibrium) state; (2) any form of behaviour that repeats itself periodically; and (3) behaviour that belongs to neither of the previous classes and is referred to as irregular, complex or chaotic. A useful way of characterizing these modes of behaviour mathematically has been through the notion of an attractor. The basic idea is to represent the state of the system at each instant as a point in an abstract geometrical space called the *phase space*. Changes in state correspond to different points in the phase space. Clearly, the 'dynamics' of a system in equilibrium corresponds to a single point in the phase space. To say that such a system has a *fixed-point attractor*, means that no matter where the system is started initially, it will tend to an equilibrium state, which corresponds to a fixed point in the phase space. Similarly, in a system with repetitive behaviour, it is easy to imagine that the points representing successive states of the system in the phase space will form a closed 'curve': because the system repeats itself periodically, it will 'visit' the same points in the phase space over and over again. A system is said to have a *periodic attractor* if, irrespective of its starting conditions, it will eventually settle into a repetitive (periodic) mode of behaviour. Systems of dimension two or less can only have fixed-point attractors or periodic attractors. These are called *simple attractors*.

Nonlinear systems of higher dimensions can have more complex attractors. Consider a system with irregular or chaotic behaviour. Here again it can be envisaged that this behaviour traces a corresponding set of points in the phase space. (In this case, the phase space has more than two dimensions, so the points do not remain within a flat plane.) Because the system does not behave in a regular fashion, the set of points traced is very complicated, and is called a *strange attractor*. Here again, the term 'attractor' is used to express the fact

that, independent of the starting conditions, a characteristic type of irregular behaviour, corresponding to the points on the attractor, is produced. This happens even when the starting conditions do not lie on the (strange) attractor. (Incidentally, it is by no means easy to identify the strange attractors of real systems displaying chaotic behaviour.) Despite their complexity, strange attractors are not arbitrary: each attractor is characteristic of the underlying system. Furthermore, strange attractors are called chaotic when the trajectories in the phase space, from two points very close on the attractor, diverge exponentially. It is this property that reflects the system's sensitive dependence on initial conditions.

Pertinent here is another result from nonlinear dynamical systems theory, due to Smale. Bearing in mind the earlier results showing that two-dimensional dynamical systems, if they are to remain bounded, are generally structurally stable, Smale conjectured and set out to prove that the same would hold for (chaotic) systems of three or more dimensions. In fact he proved the opposite by showing that such systems are typically fragile, or structurally unstable. This means that small perturbations in a system which change its control parameters (like turning on a tap a bit more), and not just its initial conditions, can result in qualitatively different modes of behaviour. Such a system may, for example, flip suddenly from one attractor to another, with potentially catastrophic consequences in a real system such as the climate.

In summary, the new developments show that chaotic behaviour (with the associated strange attractors), the existence of which is bound up with sensitive dependence on initial conditions, becomes possible as soon as we consider deterministic systems of three or more dimensions. This has the important consequence of allowing both regular and seemingly random behaviour to be treated and understood within the same theoretical framework.

### Implications and Caveats

What ramifications might these new ideas in nonlinear dynamical systems theory have for our understanding of real systems? The limitations of the mathematical models under investigation have already been stressed. Mathematically, quite simple nonlinear deterministic systems can be shown to exhibit chaotic behaviour such that small changes in initial conditions can produce unpredictable changes in future behaviour. Since nonlinearity is expected to be a common property of real systems, this type of sensitivity should be common in the real world too. In fact, recent work has produced evidence that chaos, together with sensitive dependence on initial conditions, does indeed occur in a wide variety of real systems. These range from the weather and systems displaying turbulence, to systems subject to variations in solar-energy output, population totals of various species, cardiac rhythms, the rates of certain chemical reactions, and others. A number of well-studied routes to chaos seem to occur in these systems. What is problematic in several of these cases is to explain where this chaos comes from; in other words, to understand the underlying

mechanisms in a concrete way. Nevertheless, it is at least clear that sensitive dependence on initial conditions is much more common in real systems than had been anticipated.

Consequently, whereas the old way of thinking maintained that small changes produce small effects, these new results point in the opposite direction—with potentially devastating implications. Take the global climate, for example. It is now commonly thought that the slightest perturbations in the climatic regime can have catastrophic and largely unpredictable human consequences. Add to this the realization that the climatic system could be fragile, and it is clear what the effects might be of even small man-made changes in the system, such as an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide through thoughtless energy strategies and deforestation schemes. In general, then, these new insights alert us to the possibility of a sensitive and fragile world, necessarily changing the way we think about it and (ought to) treat it. On a more positive note, it is now understood that the disorderly behaviour of simple nonlinear systems may act as a creative process: it generates complexity, producing richly organized patterns of behaviour, ranging from stable to unstable.

Epistemologically, the immediate outcome of nonlinear dynamical systems theory has been the realization that chaotic behaviour can have a simple and deterministic basis. If we want to grasp irregular, random-like behaviour, it is not necessary either to construct extremely complex models or to assume indeterminism. As a result, 'simple' Laplacean determinism has paradoxically been shown to be capable of producing enormous richness. This could have important consequences for our understanding of various phenomena: we are presented with an alternative theoretical framework within which both simple and complex deterministic behaviour may be understood in a single setting. Simultaneously, the old ideal of a robust epistemological link between determinism and predictability has had to be abandoned. Chaotic deterministic systems may allow prediction of overall patterns—for example if we can identify their strange attractors—but detailed predictability has gone. There are implications here for all forms of determinism.

In fact, the message these developments brings home is that, at least at the epistemological level, the dichotomy between deterministic and indeterministic systems is not absolute. In the nineteenth century there was widespread surprise at the discovery that statistical analyses could yield predictable results, for instance in terms of some frequency distribution of outcomes. (Presumably this surprise was not felt by insurance companies who had for some time been calculating their premiums on the basis of, for example, average rates of mortality.) Now we know that deterministic models can have outcomes distributed in as random a fashion as a series of coin tosses. So we have come full circle: probabilistic models can yield regularities, and deterministic models can yield irregularities.

Finally, a note of caution: chaos and nonlinearity may be in danger of being seen as the solution to everything. Uncritical use of the notion



of the 'butterfly effect', and glib assertions such as 'life is a strange attractor', threaten to turn chaos theory into a new mysticism. It may be a useful methodological rule to look for a strange attractor whenever Nature (or, say, the stockmarket!) appears to be behaving randomly (time will tell), but to appeal to the notion of 'attractor' in the abstract is not in itself illuminating. Nonlinear dynamical systems theory deals with mathematical models. Whether and to what extent these models have a significant explanatory value beyond mathematics depends crucially on the concrete interpretation of the variables, and their interrelations, in terms of which the models are offered.\*

The Freud Museum Presents...

# *Speculations!*

An International conference organised by the Freud Museum in London, **Speculations** will provide a forum for discussing psychoanalysis, politics, philosophy and cultural studies at the highest level.

**The participants will include:** Cornelius Castoriadis, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Jacques Derrida, James Hillman, Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman, David Krell, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Alphonso Lingis, Nicolas Rand, William Richardson, Charles Scott, Gayatri Spivak and Marja Torok.

**Conference Fee:** £95 (£50 Students, OAP's, UB40 ) paid before July 31; or £125 (£70 concs) after August 1. **Conference date:** October 26th - 28th 1990.

**Advance bookings** are recommended: Apply to the Freud Museum, 20 Maresfield Gardens, London NW3 5SX. **Telephone:** 071 - 435 2002



\* This article has been written in consultation with a number of experts in the field. I am grateful for their patience in explaining many of the technical aspects (over and over again) and in ridding me of misapprehensions. Any remaining errors are my sole responsibility.

Jan Fagerberg/Ådne Cappelen/  
Lars Mjøset/Rune Skarstein

## The Decline of Social-Democratic State Capitalism in Norway

Norway has, together with Sweden, often been idealized as the most successful case of postwar social democracy. Indeed, in economic terms the achievements are even more striking than those of its larger neighbour. Beginning the century on the agrarian fringe of European capitalism, Norway has been transformed into a country whose per capita GDP in 1987 was second only to that of Switzerland in Europe, and whose egalitarian culture and level of social provision have captured the attention of radical reformists throughout the world. Several elements of this advance have been common to Scandinavia as a whole, but as we shall see, the relationship between state and economy has developed in fairly distinct ways in the region. Moreover, the neo-liberal 'blue wave' which rolled over Western Europe in the 1980s has had considerably greater impact in Norway than in Sweden, combining with the pressures of a destabilized international economy to threaten many of the postwar structures. This makes it easier to appreciate the earlier accomplishments of social democracy, but it also shows that the Nordic innovations

often depended upon the convergence of specific national conditions with the dynamic phase of Western capitalism that lasted from 1945 to 1973. In this article we shall outline the formative stages of the Norwegian political economy with special emphasis on the problems encountered by Norwegian reformism as high growth turned to low growth, concluding with critical reflections on the vicissitudes of the 'Norwegian model' and its prospects in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Origins and Development of the Norwegian Model

In 1814 Denmark lost its Norwegian colony, which gained home rule in a union with Sweden. Norway was at that time primarily a minifundia economy, with extensive peasant ownership and no indigenous aristocracy.<sup>2</sup> The groups in power—state bureaucrats, a small but growing bourgeoisie, a few rich farmers—were weak and politically divided, although the bureaucrats regarded the farmers as their loyal clients and pushed for a constitution that would enfranchise all freeholders and leaseholders. In fact, the Constitution of 1814 created a political system particularly open to mobilization by peasants and other 'peripheral' groups,<sup>3</sup> who secured a high degree of local government in the 1830s.<sup>4</sup> From the 1850s the ruling elites were also challenged at the cultural level. Teetotalist and lay protestant movements were stronger than elsewhere in Scandinavia, and Norway, like Finland, experienced a movement for language revival, with the result that today it has two official languages: standard Norwegian (akin to Danish) and new Norwegian (more like rural dialects).

In the second half of the nineteenth century these two currents became the poles within the National Assembly. The Liberals or *Venstre* (literally, 'Left') were the party of the rural and 'countercultural' groups, with important support among the urban intelligentsia,

<sup>1</sup> The account below draws upon and extends our studies of the Norwegian model and its problems in the present structural crisis. With the exception of Rune Skarstein, 'Facts and Policies of Developed Countries: Some Social Democratic Experiences from Norway', *Motvæksmonet* xxxiv, February–October 1982, these studies were conducted with the Nordic Economic Policy Project, whose main report (Lars Mjøsset, ed., *Nordens økonomiske utvikling*, Oslo 1986) is summarized in Mjøsset, 'Nordic Economic Policies in the 1970s and 1980s', *International Organization*, 21/3, 1987. Our analysis is partly inspired by the theoretical framework developed within the French Regulation School: see Robert Boyer, *La théorie de la régulation: une analyse critique*, Paris 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Alan S. Milward, *The Fascist Economy in Norway*, Norway 1972, chapter two; Alan Milward and S.B. Saul, *The Economic Development of Continental Europe 1780–1870*, London 1973, chapter eight. For comparative perspectives on Norway and Scandinavia in a European context, see György Ránki and Ivan T. Berend, *The European Periphery and Industrialization 1780–1914*, Cambridge 1982; Dieter Senghaas, *The European Experience*, Leamington Spa 1985; Matti Alestalo and Stein Kuhnle, 'The Scandinavian Route: Economic, Social and Political Developments in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden', in Robert Erikson et al., *The Scandinavian Model: Welfare States and Welfare Research*, New York 1987.

<sup>3</sup> On the international context, see Risto Alapuro, 'Interstate Relationships and Political Mobilization in the Nordic Countries: A Perspective', in Alapuro et al., eds., *Small States in Comparative Perspective: Essays for Erik Allardt*, Oslo 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Stein Rokkan and Henry Valen, 'Norway: Conflict Structure and Mass Politics in a European Periphery', in Richard Rose, ed., *Electoral Behavior*, New York/London 1974; Frank H. Aarebrot, 'Norway: Centre and Periphery in a Peripheral State', in Stein Rokkan and Derek W. Urwin, eds., *The Politics of Territorial Identity*, London 1982.

teachers in particular, while the Conservatives or *Høyre* (literally, 'Right') united high-level bureaucrats and certain business interests. The Liberals led the struggle for parliamentarism, which was finally established in 1884. When the Labour Party (DNA) was founded in 1887, it initially collaborated with the Liberals and was successful in winning general suffrage and achieving some basic social demands.

In the nineteenth century the Norwegian economy contained a few modernizing islands within an ocean of traditionalist agriculture. The major industries were forestry, mining, fisheries and shipping.<sup>5</sup> From 1850 the opening of the world economy under British dominance spurred a certain diversification into pulp and paper production, whaling and canning, and by the 1880s Norway had developed the world's third largest commercial fleet. Towards the end of the century, however, tendencies of inertia were becoming apparent: traditionalist agriculture hampered the rational exploitation of forests, Norwegian fisheries were failing to adjust to high-income markets, and shipping was lagging behind in the change from sail to steam. Then the possibility of employing Norwegian water power in modern energy-intensive production processes (e.g. furnace processes) suddenly drew the attention of international capital to the country as a suitable place for the manufacturing of fertilizers, aluminium, steel, and chemicals. The Norwegian bourgeoisie and the state were unable to exploit these options themselves, and so heavy industry, with many of the plants scattered at the end of the western fjords, close to the great waterfalls, became largely dependent on foreign investment. Political pressure to secure increasing spin-offs for Norwegian industrialists came mainly from the ranks of the Liberal Party. It is important to realize that Norway's industrial structure still rests upon these historical layers: a fairly large forest industry, a heavy furnace industry producing semi-finished metals and chemicals, and finally shipping, which in the interwar period managed to solve its late-nineteenth-century problems.

As the class structure of Norway changed in the early part of the century through the process of industrialization, the Liberals and Conservatives failed to join forces in a single non-socialist party. This weakness was accentuated by the splits from the Liberals: first an Agrarian party was founded in 1920 to represent the purely economic interests of the farmers; then a Christian Party sprang up in the 1930s and went on to become a national presence with support from the teetotalist and lay protestant countercultures. The Liberals were left as mainly the party of urban intellectuals.<sup>6</sup>

There were also splits among the socialists. In the 1920s, as a radical syndicalist fraction took over the Labour Party, a social-democratic grouping broke away to the right. When Labour left the Comintern in

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Hodne, *An Economic History of Norway 1815-1970*, prel. ed., Trondheim 1975; T. Bergh, T.J. Hanisch, E. Lange and H. Pharo, *Growth and Development: The Norwegian Experience 1850-1980*, Oslo 1981. Both have later revised editions, but only in Norwegian.

<sup>6</sup> Stein Rokkan, 'Norway. Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism', in R. Dahl, ed., *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*, New Haven 1966.

1923 after a short period of membership, a Communist Party (NKP) split off. But it never became an influential factor in Norwegian politics, and the two other parties soon reunited. In this way, the party structure became characterized by a strong, homogeneous Labour Party and a non-socialist bloc fragmented into four parties, whose policies have again and again proved difficult to reconcile.<sup>7</sup>

Partly as a response to the crisis of the early 1930s, Labour turned to reformism, and the trade-union confederation (LO) and the Norwegian Employers' Association (NAF) negotiated a nationwide general agreement which homogenized various conditions (concerning voting regulations, support actions, etc.) earlier laid down in uncoordinated collective agreements. Thus a genuine labour-capital compromise guaranteed industrial peace throughout the period covered by the agreement. Such a development would, of course, have been hard to imagine without the powerful and self-assertive advance of the trade-union movement, whose membership rose consistently from 84,000 in 1922 to 357,000 on the eve of World War II. At the same time, the DNA more than doubled its membership from 80,000 in 1930 to 170,000 in 1938. A large proportion of this total (currently around 60 per cent) joined through a system of collective affiliation of trade unions, although, as in Sweden but unlike in Britain, union bodies did not as such have any say in the Party's decision-making process.

At the parliamentary level the Labour Party reached an interwar peak of 42.5 per cent of the vote in 1936, but could seize government power only by allying with one of the non-socialist parties.<sup>8</sup> A Scandinavian precedent had already been set in Sweden with the 1933 agreement between the Social Democrats and the farmers' party, and in Norway a huge rural debt crisis made the Agrarian Party the obvious candidate for an alliance. Labour itself had a considerable following in the countryside—not only among forestry and other land labourers but also among small farmers and fishermen—and fascist attempts to mobilize these strata added further importance to the building of an alternative. It was in the year of the LO-NAF accord, 1935, that the Labour Party came to power with the support of the Agrarians.<sup>9</sup> Since it proved a moderate government in office, it was able to manoeuvre successfully for the next four years between the Liberals and the Agrarians.

This gives the formula for Norwegian reformism: a social compromise between labour and capital (administered by the respective federations) plus a political alliance with rural groups (farmers and fishermen). Subsidies served to bolster the support of small farmers and agricultural labourers, but also reflected a temporary convergence

---

<sup>7</sup> Francis G. Castles, *The Social Democratic Image of Society*, London 1978.

<sup>8</sup> In 1928, a first Labour government, led by Chr. Hornsrud, was forced to resign by bourgeois forces, after only twenty-eight days in power.

<sup>9</sup> Earlier in the 1920s the Agrarians had supported the Conservative Party in opposition to the labour movement's struggle for standardized collective bargaining. The wartime 'national traitor' Vidkun Quisling had served as defence minister for the Agrarians in 1931-33.

of interests between the labour movement and the wealthier farmers who would never vote for Labour. The class compromise required labour peace, and in both Sweden and Norway strike activity declined as Labour came to power in the 1930s. But while private business still controlled investment decisions, workers expected the Party in government to fight unemployment and develop the welfare state. Through legislation and political control, Labour would secure a social democracy involving equal citizens' rights for all.<sup>20</sup>

### Political and Economic Integration in the Postwar World

Five years of Nazi occupation, in which the Quisling forces never sank significant roots among the population, created a strong sentiment of national unity and responsibility that found expression in 1945 in a Programme of National Recovery. Prefiguring the idea of an institutionalized welfare state, this document was accepted by all the political parties, from the Communists to the Conservatives, although the Labour Party was unquestionably the chief architect of the postwar order. In the December general elections it won an absolute majority (76 out of 150 seats) that it would retain until 1961. The Communists, sustained by their record in the wartime resistance, won a further 11 seats.

In the fateful years of 1948–49, while Swedish social democracy resisted pressures to abandon its military neutrality, a substantial minority of the DNA argued for the formation of a Nordic defence union. But in the end the DNA leadership threw itself behind the NATO drive and joined the US-inspired attempt to delegitimize the Communist presence within the labour movement. As the effects of the Cold War began to be felt, the NKP lost all its seats in the 1949 election, its percentage vote declined from 12 per cent in 1945 to 6 per cent in 1949—and later to an average of 1 per cent in the 1970s. At the same time, Norway's participation in the Marshall Plan played its role in locking the country into Atlantic trade and production circuits.

In the late 1940s Labour's economic policies were strongly selective, giving priority to the established export sectors (the 'enclave'). The state played a key role in this process, especially since German property was nationalized after the war and there were difficulties in persuading private institutions to finance the large capital requirements necessary to expand the activity of the enclave. During the 1950s and 1960s export incomes from the enclave financed the 'modernization' of the Norwegian economy and the erection of a full-fledged welfare state. Extension of the wage relation and collective bargaining secured steady growth in consumption, following the growth in manufacturing productivity. The composition of consumption was in line with the 'Fordist' pattern which was then spreading from the United States to Western Europe.<sup>21</sup> To some extent, especially after entry into EFTA

<sup>20</sup> Gösta Esping-Andersen, *Politics Against Markets*, Princeton 1985. For strike statistics and broader comparative perspectives, see Walter Korpi, *The Democratic Class Struggle*, London 1982.

<sup>21</sup> Angus Maddison, *Phases of Capitalist Growth*, Oxford 1982; Michael Piore and Charles Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide*, New York 1984; Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, Verso, London 1979; Robert Boyer, *La théorie de la régulation*, op. cit.

in 1959, this gave birth to indigenous production of typically 'Fordist' consumer goods.

Enclave production, located in isolated one-plant towns, was very capital-intensive. Often it formed just one link in a vertically integrated chain organized by multinational corporations. Aluminium provides a good example. Raw bauxite or alumina was shipped from a source country (Jamaica, Australia) for smelting in Norwegian furnaces that could take advantage of the country's large quantities of cheap energy. The aluminium output or other semi-finished product was then mainly re-exported for further processing in European manufacturing plants. The linkage effects from this export enclave were quite limited—a pattern which continued in the oil sector in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, since the end of the sailing era, the shipping sector had itself become increasingly isolated from the Norwegian domestic economy. Until the 1960s, shipyards were quite small, and Norwegian shipowners not only plied foreign oceans, they also largely contracted and financed their ships abroad.

The macroeconomic impact of these import-, capital- and energy-intensive export sectors has been quite peculiar. The fluctuations that have occurred in Norwegian exports have only to a very limited extent spread to the domestic economy, because the share of domestic resources in production has been low. The main variations have been in inventories and imports. Since the economy has a number of 'automatic stabilizers',<sup>2</sup> policy-makers—despite their enthusiastic Keynesianism—hardly needed to conduct extensive counter-cyclical operations before the early 1970s.

### The Postwar Economic Policy Model

The environment of a dynamic postwar world economy was certainly important for the Norwegian economy, but it is also essential to trace the domestic forces which determined the institutions related to labour, natural resources and credit. Labour's key goals were high and stable growth, external balance, full employment, a stable price level and a more egalitarian distribution of income. Its economic policy implied the continuation of the class compromise and political alliances of the late interwar period, the generalization of a mass-consumption way of life, and the development of the welfare state. The large agricultural sector, with its low productivity, was considered a major structural problem. Labour-market and regional policies were designed to promote structural change. The dualism between urban-industrial and rural-agricultural areas was exploited in such a way as to secure a stable supply of labour-power to industry and services.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> These differences stand out also in strictly macroeconomic comparisons. See P. Schelde Anderson and J. Åkerholm, 'Scandinavia', in A. Boltho, ed., *The European Economy. Growth and Crisis*, Oxford 1982.

<sup>3</sup> For the importance of the closing of this internal gap, see Charles P. Kindleberger, *Europe's Postwar Growth: The Role of Labor Supply*, Cambridge, Mass. 1967; John Cornwall, *Modern Capitalism*, London 1977; Burkart Lutz, *Der kurze Traum immerwährender Prosperität*, Frankfurt/Main 1982. For the specific Norwegian experience, see Natalie Rogoff Ramsøy, 'From Necessity to Choice: Social Change in Norway 1930–1980', in Robert Erikson et al., *The Scandinavian Model*, op. cit.

system of regional policies was established to moderate some of the effects of regional restructuring.

Incomes policies were centralized during the early years of reconstruction, but from the late 1940s the state left it to the labour-market partners to reach a compromise on their own. During the 1960s the degree of state intervention again increased. In 1965 a non-socialist government set up a 'Technical Calculations' Committee to consider the effects of income settlements in an era of growing international inflation. Its so-called 'Scandinavian model of inflation', mainly formalizing the postwar class compromise, concluded that 'responsible' wage growth should be determined by the growth of world market prices and productivity growth in the exposed sector of the economy. Thus, the exposed sector would be the wage-leader. This would secure a constant wage/profit share in this sector as well as in the sheltered sectors of the economy where prices would be determined by a fairly constant 'mark-up' on unit costs. The model's assumption of a constant wage/profit share was a generalization from postwar Norwegian experience. To the extent that productivity growth in the sheltered sectors fell below that of the exposed sector, this would turn up as domestic inflation, which would be above or below inflation in other countries, depending on similar developments there. Clearly this model showed the crucial importance of a stable relationship to world trends in a small, open economy.<sup>14</sup>

In this context a universalist (or institutional) notion of the welfare state, specific to Scandinavia,<sup>15</sup> rejected private or employment-related insurance arrangements and extended the provision of benefits to all citizens, thereby stabilizing effective demand for the population outside the workforce. The twin goals of universal welfare provision and industrial development were underpinned by monetary policies that might be termed 'credit socialism'. This peculiar system, which involved a high rate of forced savings by the state, also had implications for the routines of fiscal policy: in order to save, the state had to run budget surpluses. The state also issued bonds, which private financial institutions were forced by law to buy. While strong controls were maintained over the supply of external credit, the total volume of credits was regulated by the state in collaboration with private banks.

Compared with most other Western countries, state banks have played a rather important role within the Norwegian economy. Continuing a system which, in the case of agriculture, went back to the mid nineteenth century, the Labour government assured the financing of sectors that were particularly in need of long-term credit (for example, power plants) and extended and reorganized state banks for housing

---

<sup>14</sup> Odd Ankrust, 'Inflation in the Open Economy' in L.B. Krause/W. Salar, eds., *Worldwide Inflation*, Washington D.C. 1977. The fact that sheltered sectors fell into line with the exposed sectors may be seen as an expression of 'solidaristic' wage policy. But above all, it reflected the dominance of the exposed sector workers within the LO. Starting in the 1970s, this dominance was challenged, as we shall see below.

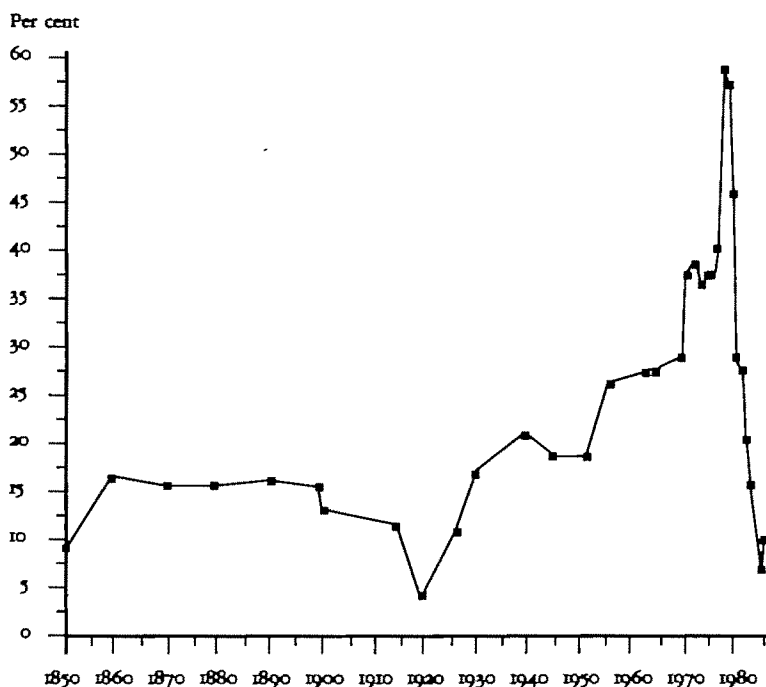
<sup>15</sup> Gösta Esping-Anderson and Walter Korpi, 'From Poor Relief to Institutional Welfare States: The Development of Scandinavian Social Policy', in Erikson et. al., op. cit.



(1947), agriculture (1948), education (1947) and local industrial development (1968). Manufacturing industry, on the other hand, did not borrow much from the state banks. Figure 1 gives a historical overview, and shows that the state banks' share of total credit increased significantly in the 1960s and had reached 36 per cent by 1971.

Figure 1

The State Banks' Share of Total Credit Supply 1890-1986



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook*, various years; H. Skjinnland, *Det norske kreditmarkedet*, Samfunnsøkonomiske Studier, vol. 19, Oslo 1967.

The Norwegian state bank for housing (*Husbanken*) financed residential construction according to specific standards at a very favourable rate of interest. Public or municipal housing is virtually non-existent in Norway, and the largely realized goal of government policy was to ensure that as many families as possible lived in a small house of their own. In some urban areas, however, both cooperative housing and privately owned flats played an important role, and the larger cooperatives would collaborate closely with local authorities and receive *Husbank* subsidies. The prices of cooperative flats, unlike those of private houses, were controlled by the state.

The routines of the postwar Norwegian model may be summed up as follows. A constant wage/profit share, secured through incomes policies, involved the typical Golden Age constellation of productivity-related wage increases. Manufacturing industry was embedded in a mixed economy which involved considerable public influence over sectoral developments. State intervention in the monetary system,

with rationing of credits, was used partly to finance investments in infrastructure and other priority sectors, and partly to fund a universalist welfare state. The state's pursuit of relatively tight fiscal policies, with budget surpluses to finance the system of public credits, does not imply that the model was anti-Keynesian. Rather, it was the use of the budget surplus which displayed the counter-cyclical nature of the model. For example, the state would finance inventories in the export enclave when prices slumped, or the housing bank would stimulate construction if demand slackened. We have termed this a 'state-capitalist' model—not in the sense of an evolutionary scheme, but to point out the specificities of Norway's political economy in comparison with the four other Nordic countries.<sup>66</sup>

The Labour Party dominated the formative 1950s to such an extent that a Liberal historian described the Norwegian system as a 'one-party state'. Nor, with the traumatic events of the 1920s behind it, did the DNA allow the existence of organized fractions. But after the decision to back NATO had been taken, a group of Party activists continued to favour a Nordic defence alternative and gained new young supporters in anti-nuclear mobilizations. In 1960 the leaders of this informal fraction, which published its own weekly and dominated the Party's student groups, were expelled on charges of factional activity. This led to the founding of a left-wing Socialist People's Party (SF) which, despite its lack of a nationwide organization, won two seats in the 1961 election and put an end to the era of absolute Labour majorities. The main elements of SF policy were: neutrality, disarmament, protest against nuclear weapons, criticism of the superpowers, rejection of Norway's membership of NATO, strengthening of the United Nations, anti-colonialism, development aid, decentralized wage negotiations and more egalitarian income distribution. SF was not simply a party of 'teachers' or public-sector new middle classes; it had considerable working-class support, and its electoral geography—weak in the south and west, strong in the north and many parts of the east—was the same as that of the Labour Party. Like its counterparts in many other European countries, the DNA in the 1960s had to face the problems of a declining and less active membership: from a historic peak of 204,000 in 1949, its numbers steadily dwindled to 174,000 in 1955 and 130,000 in 1971. This tendency, which reduced the Party's organizational strength within Norwegian society as a whole, went together with greater centralization and a growing distance between leadership and rank and file.<sup>67</sup>

In the 1965 elections Labour and SF still won more than half of the vote, but SF, though gaining no new seats, more than doubled its support to 6 per cent. This helped the non-socialist bloc to capture six seats from Labour and to form a coalition government that would last until 1971—a government in which the Conservatives were the

<sup>66</sup> See Mjøset, *op. cit.*, on the notion of an economic policy model, and for comparisons with the other Nordic models.

<sup>67</sup> Knut Heidar, 'The Norwegian Labour Party: Social Democracy in a Periphery of Europe', in William H. Paterson and Alastair H. Thomas, eds., *Social Democratic Parties in Western Europe*, London 1977.

largest single party, but which was dominated by the forces of the Liberal, Agrarian and Christian parties. The new government maintained the established routines throughout the late 1960s, using actively, for example, as a means to control the credit system, a new interventionist law that had been passed by its Labour predecessor. It also introduced a new social-security scheme, akin to Sweden's ATP superannuation, which clearly incarnated the principles of the universalist welfare state. Only in the 1970s would a combination of internal and external pressures pose the first serious challenge to the postwar model.

## 2. Social Democracy in the 1970s

In the early 1970s, just as oil was about to make a dramatic impact on the economy, a heated and sharply divisive debate broke out on whether to follow one of Norway's major trading partners, Britain, into the European Community. The pro-EC bloc brought together the two main elements of the postwar class compromise: the Conservative Party as representative of business elites, and Labour as representative of the working class, whose 'hegemonic' groups worked in the exposed sectors. Regarding membership as a natural extension both of the trade liberalization of the 1960s and of the trend towards intensified political cooperation in Europe, they insistently argued that manufacturing industry must not become stuck outside the tariff walls.

The anti-EC bloc may be seen as a revival of the interwar alliance between workers, farmers and other 'countercultural' currents, plus radicalized sections of the urban intelligentsia, students and new middle classes. It was a very mixed coalition which, for *different* reasons, no longer had confidence in the postwar Fordist model of mass consumption, productivity-linked growth of real wages, rationalization of the labour process, and greater efficiency of the primary sector. Since the latter trend worked to reduce the population of rural areas, all the primary-sector organizations turned against Norwegian membership, and the Agrarians felt that they could no longer negotiate for a policy that large parts of their constituency would not accept. The government fell apart as a result of internal disagreements over the EC issue, and a minority Labour government took over from the non-socialist coalition and attempted to complete the negotiations. The Labour and LO leaderships, however, were not able to contain the spread of anti-membership attitudes among their rank and file, and both SF and many shop stewards took an active part in mobilizing against EC membership. The protest also focused on problems of pollution and urbanization, as well as on the increasing number of large dams and dry rivers that were the product of new power plants. Farmers and environmentalists, rank-and-file reformists and radical students soon learned to link their arguments into an impressive political rhetoric. Within the protestant lay movements, anti-EC activists preached that integration with the Catholic European countries would let loose Anti-Christ, and they also feared the coming of cheap alcohol.

The campaign against EC membership became a wave strong enough to challenge the growth pact between organized labour and organized

capital. The type of mobilization was also significant: an organized grassroots 'People's Movement against the EC' outside of parties and parliament. A definite majority of MPs, however, were in favour of membership, as were 93 newspapers with 81 per cent of total weekly circulation.<sup>28</sup> The challenge to the legitimacy of the traditional media and parliamentary channels made a referendum inevitable, and on 25 September 1972 a majority of 53.5 per cent voted against Norwegian membership. All interests linked to export-oriented business regarded the outcome as a major setback. The Labour government immediately resigned and a minority government of the Liberals, the Agrarians and the Christian Party took over.

The ensuing election, in 1973, brought the most dramatic changes since the war. The Labour Party lost 12 seats to remain with 63 deputies and 35.3 per cent of the vote, and the Conservatives lost votes but retained their 19 seats. The Liberal Party, split over the EC issue, was nearly driven out of parliament altogether, while the other two centre parties gained in both votes and seats.<sup>29</sup> The tax-revolt party, later named the Progress Party or FRP, made its debut with 4 deputies. But the biggest breakthrough was made by the alliance of SF, NKP and other anti-EC socialists who, having united in the SV (Socialist Electoral Alliance), won 16 seats and 11.2 per cent of the vote. At this very moment, however, a world recession was on its way, greatly complicating the articulation of politics and economics within Norway, and the long-term pressure of the crisis would severely undermine SV's excited vision of a new populist alliance of workers, farmers and fishermen betrayed by Labour. Besides, it was not long before the Communists went their own way again. In the parliamentary situation of 1973 Labour was still the largest party and formed another minority government.

### Response to Structural Crisis

Over the next four years a number of factors pushed Labour to conduct expansionist economic policies: not only did it wish to regain lost votes, the recession anyway called for counter-cyclical policies, and Norwegian oil exploration was giving rise to an investment boom and expectations of large increases in export revenues due to OPEC 1. The oil sector, in fact, shared a number of characteristics with the export enclave analysed earlier: capital-intensive production of raw materials or semi-finished products for export, dependence on imports of machinery, and financing by government sources and foreign capital. Norway started extraction of oil on its continental shelf in the North Sea at a point when OPEC became a dominant force in international

<sup>28</sup> Heidar, *Nordiske politiske fakta 1884-1872*, Oslo 1983, p. 271.

<sup>29</sup> Aarebrot, *op. cit.*, points to the geographical correspondence between anti-EC majorities and traditional countercultural districts. As a 'far left' consequence of the enthusiastic post-referendum populism, the Workers' Communist Party (AKP-m) had been formed in early 1973, based on a group of Stalinist/Maoist students who had split off from SF in 1968. This party polls less than 1 per cent of the voters, has never been in parliament, but has readjusted through the 1980s as a party of mainly new middle-class leftism. Unlike SV, the party manages to put out a daily newspaper (*Class Struggle*), which has a circulation much wider than members only.

oil business, to the advantage of all, including non-OPEC, producer countries.<sup>20</sup> Between 1972 and 1980 the share of oil in total Norwegian exports leapt from 0.1 per cent to 35 per cent, much helped by OPEC I and II. Since no Norwegian private firm could raise the necessary finance, most of the capital was supplied by the state and foreign oil companies, drawing on international money markets where banks were competing with one another to lend. Statoil—the public oil corporation—became the very pinnacle of Norwegian state capitalism.

The expansionist policies followed by the Labour government from 1975 also involved defensive 'back-door' measures to shore up export sectors such as shipping, shipyards and fisheries that were affected by the slump. At the same time, monetary policies, including adherence to the European 'snake', brought a revaluation of the Norwegian currency, not only lowering inflation but also cheapening imports and squeezing exports. Generous tax policies, as well as price and profit controls, guaranteed high wage increases within a system of centralized and 'combined' incomes policy settlements, so that real disposable income grew at a record average of 5 per cent a year between 1974 and 1977. Farmers' income levels also shot up—by 50 per cent in 1976–77—as a result of a broadly supported parliamentary decision to equalize earnings in manufacturing and farming. Reforms in social policy (reduced working hours and lower retirement age) and work-environment protection further benefited households, and the public sector—particularly local government—expanded strongly throughout these years. The combined effect of all these developments was a veritable boom in consumption and consumer-goods production and extremely low unemployment. More ominously, Norway was building up the largest current-account deficit in the whole OECD area (12 per cent of GDP in 1976, 14 per cent in 1977). But there were no objections from the OECD,<sup>21</sup> and total foreign debt reached a record 47 per cent of GDP by the end of 1978.

In terms of votes, the expansionist policy paid off for Labour. At the 1977 general elections the distribution of seats between Labour and left socialists was 'normalized' to 76:2, which kept a combined majority in parliament (just as in 1961) and boosted the self-confidence of the Labour government. But on the other side, the Agrarians lost 9 seats out of 21 and the Conservatives jumped from 19 to 41 seats. The 'blue wave' was approaching.

During 1977 it became clear that the 1974–75 downturn had not been the usual mild recession but rather the start of a structural crisis, a challenge to the postwar growth model itself. The stagnation in manufacturing alarmed employers, and a new liberal orthodoxy—ignoring such structural problems as the earlier overinvestment in shipping, the unfavourable country/commodity composition of exports, the raw

---

<sup>20</sup> Petter Nore, 'The International Oil Industry and National Economic Development: the Case of Norway', in Faundez and Picciotto, eds., *The Nationalization of Multinationals in Peripheral Countries*, London 1978.

<sup>21</sup> The IMF imposed conditions on British economic policies in the same period, with a current account deficit of only 3.8 per cent of GDP in 1974. Norway, however, with its oil reserves, did not have to borrow from the IMF; private Eurobanks gladly supplied the credit.

materials boom of 1972-73, and the effects of krone revaluation<sup>22</sup>—began to blame the crisis on rising unit-labour costs and counter-cyclical government policies.

The Labour government found it imperative to share these worries of export-oriented private business and, with OPEC II still unforeseen, warned that oil incomes might turn out to be smaller than expected. However, the public-expenditure programmes which determine fiscal policies are not altered quickly, and so the first adjustments began in late 1977 in the credit market with a turn to higher interest rates and restrictions on private bank lending.<sup>23</sup> These restrictions increased the share of the state banks in total credits from 36 per cent in the first half of the 1970s to 56 per cent in 1978 and 54 per cent in 1979 (see Figure 1).

With regard to the exchange rate, the government turned to a policy of devaluation. And in order to prevent claims for compensation against rising import prices, it implemented a full wage freeze between September 1978 and January 1980 which contributed to the decline in real incomes until 1981. Finally fiscal policies were also tightened, although an upturn in exports from 1978 prevented a sharp increase in unemployment. The second oil-price shock in 1979 then relieved Norway of current-account problems.

Concerning housing policies, Labour faced problems which turned out to have important political repercussions. State controls had kept the price of cooperative flats (allocated according to fixed rules of seniority, length of time in the queue, etc.) far below the market price for comparable, privately owned accommodation. As long as tenants changed to better flats within the system, the low prices did not really matter, and new tenants benefited from the low prices since they (or close relatives) had been queueing up as members. However, compared with owners of private houses and flats, members found themselves unable to reap the wealth effects of inflation and increases in the real price of houses, and a number of ingenious techniques were developed to evade the regulations. This clearly undermined Labour's policy goal of a regulated, low-price market for urban housing, and a heated debate ensued in 1976 and 1977. In the end the government attempted to ban the various irregular transactions and thus to maintain 'Golden Age' routines in a period of high inflation. But the Conservative Party was able to capitalize on the pressure for abolition of price controls, which was probably one of the factors behind Labour's reduced support in the 1981 elections.<sup>24</sup>

To summarize, throughout the mid 1970s Keynesian counter-cyclical policies were used extensively for the first time in the history of the postwar Norwegian model. These produced a consumption boom

---

<sup>22</sup> These structural factors are more thoroughly analysed in Mjøsset, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> But if tax deductions are taken into account, real interest rates remained negative until the early 1980s.

<sup>24</sup> Ann Heien Bay, *Boligstatus og stammebygning*, thesis, Dept. of Political Science, University of Oslo 1985. The Conservatives recorded high gains, particularly in the large towns

unexpected in its magnitude, and the Labour government responded with a fumbling revision of its economic-policy routines, which pointed towards increasing direct regulations, particularly in the credit market.<sup>25</sup> The growing impact of the state banks was not really a conscious policy, however, and it would be an exaggeration to claim that Figure 1 above shows that Norwegian Labour was about to complete Keynes's 'euthanasia of the rentier'. The wage freeze and new restrictions on independent housing cooperatives also implied more direct intervention. Some of these regulations were attacked both by business interests and by non-socialist politicians. There was even talk of a radicalization of Labour, and of irresponsible use of oil revenues in connection with work-environment reforms and similar post-referendum legislation. These years, 1977-78, marked the takeoff phase of the blue wave.

### The Blue Wave

Increasing support for the Conservative Party was the most striking change in Norwegian electoral behaviour from 1977 up to 1985. This rise has been linked to the 'modernization' of Norway: integration in an international Fordist production system, extension of the wage relation, collective bargaining and American-style mass consumption. Some scholars argue that modernization tendencies in the twenty-year period from 1960 'quietly and gradually' enhanced the electoral opportunities of the Conservative Party. Such an interpretation is in line with the general pluralist modernization theory typical of American political science of the 1960s. It claims that the growth of affluence and the welfare state, as well as social and cultural modernization and the consolidation of national media, created a political climate that favoured the Conservative Party with its emphasis on property rights and individual self-realization.<sup>26</sup> Such trends are said to have weakened small special-interest parties like the left socialists or the Agrarians and also—through secularization—the Christian Party,<sup>27</sup> converting the two largest parties into depoliticized catch-all formations of the American type.

This pluralist view, with its emphasis on the spread of the mass-consumption model, may appear similar to our own analysis of socio-economic transformation. However, we assume no straightforward relationship between social modernization, cultural standardization and Conservative strength. Thus, during the years from 1961 to 1969—a period of strong internationalization and extension of television

<sup>25</sup> This was clearly an unintended result, since in 1980 the Labour government supported a public report on monetary policies, which proposed considerable deregulation and liberalization of the credit markets. Discussions of the new Party programme in the late 1970s focused on notions of 'ungovernability' and expressed a certain planning pessimism very different from the attitude of the Golden Age.

<sup>26</sup> Stein Kuhnle, Kaare Strøm and Lars Svendsen, 'The Norwegian Conservative Party: Setback in an Era of Strength', *West European Politics* 9/3, 1986, p. 465.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, the language struggle has ceased to be important in Norwegian politics during the last ten years. The Conservative Party has won a following also in rural areas, and there are Conservative politicians in parliament who talk in new Norwegian, ironically dubbed 'Bunads-Høyre' ('conservatives in national dress').

and modern media culture—there was no major (net) change in the support for different parties. Furthermore, the changes that did appear in 1972–73 were actually the precise opposite of what a generalized modernization approach would predict: the moves to join the Common Market, during the last hectic boom of the West's steady postwar upswing, strengthened both the far left and the centre. In a climate where ideologies of zero growth and environmentalism were strong, the referendum result represented a reaction against 'modernization', understood both as further economic integration and political unification with Europe.

It might be argued that 1972–73 was a temporary deviation from a modernization trend which has since revived, but this view is not really borne out by the evidence. The Conservatives' electoral gains (from 17.4 per cent and 29 seats in 1973 to 31 per cent and 54 seats in 1981) were certainly the largest made by any party since the ascent of Labour in the 1920s. The Conservative Party increased its share of the vote in *all* occupational groups, becoming the second largest working-class party as the percentage of LO members voting for it climbed from 6 per cent in 1972 to 20 per cent in 1980. Significant gains were even made among voters with 'countercultural' sympathies, and among farmers and fishermen.<sup>28</sup> In spite of this impressive record, however, the Conservatives' electoral growth was not really a gradual process but largely took place around the election of 1977 and in early 1979—two periods which saw important debates on economic policies.<sup>29</sup>

In the first period, just after the election of September 1977, opposition attacks gathered momentum as Labour began to accept criticism of its counter-cyclical policies. The improvements for Norwegian workers and farmers, achieved during the previous phase, were now presented as proof of Labour's mismanagement of the economy, and the Employers' Association sharply criticized the defensive industrial policies. Moreover, although Labour was preparing to reduce government expenditure in this area, its first attempts to tighten economic policy in 1977 and 1978 actually involved *more* direct regulation and caused still greater hostility. Members of independent housing cooperatives were frustrated by price controls. Business interests and banks attacked intervention in the financial system. And the problems of long-term economic stagnation brought the competitiveness of export industry into sharper focus. The Conservative Party was ready to synthesize all these points, quite successfully blaming all problems on Labour's interventionist policies. In other words, the criticism centred on the problems that were arising as Labour tried to adjust (but not discard) the Norwegian model in an era of new external and

---

<sup>28</sup> Kuhnle, Strøm, Svåsand, *op. cit.*, p. 466, drawing on analyses reported in Henry Valen, *Valg og Politikk*, Oslo 1981, and in T. Bjørklund and B. Hagrvet, eds., *Høyrørelsen*, Oslo 1982.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Heidar, *Norske Politiske fakta*, Table 5.3. By the beginning of 1980, Labour had declined so far that all institutes found that the Conservatives had about the same level of support. Later, however, the gap widened again, and the Conservatives are still only the second largest party in Norway.



internal conditions.<sup>30</sup> The changing pattern of party support was not simply a materialistic response by citizens now exposed to austerity; it largely reflected an ideological victory of the Conservative Party in the debates on economic policy.

The next breakthrough at the polls, midway through the wage freeze that came into effect in September 1978, carried the Conservatives to an all-time high of nearly 34 per cent in March 1979. Their support then began to decline, only to grow again at the approach of elections in the second half of 1981. Throughout this period, Labour was revising its party programme and presenting itself in a more 'social-liberal' guise that involved, for example, support for schemes to deregulate the financial system. But once again, this only benefited the Conservatives, who could now maintain that Labour was converging with the greater part of Conservative principles.

The idea of a return to earlier modernization tendencies is therefore inaccurate. Within a perspective of the sociology of knowledge, pluralist modernization theory may be said to have generalized the experience of the postwar boom. But the onset of a period of economic crisis clearly changed the whole context. In the political economy of the West after 1973-74, neither modernization nor reactions to modernization are the most important trends. Rather, *problems with modernization*—more difficult trade-offs in economic policies and structural problems in industry—are the most characteristic features. The challenge is to trace the interaction between such groups of factors. Any attempt to isolate a 'pure' tendency towards modernization is a monocausal fallacy. There is no reason to believe that such a pure trend will emerge in the future; it will be disturbed or displaced by the other kinds of trends that we have mentioned.

### 3. The Right in Power: 1981-86

The 1981 election gave the three non-socialist parties a majority—this time with the Conservatives as the dominant force, with 54 seats against a total of 25 for the two remaining centre parties, the Agrarians and the Christian Party. The Conservatives had extended their organizational apparatus to encompass the whole country and had proved very astute in employing new public-relations techniques.<sup>31</sup> As it turned out, however, the Christian Party split with the Conservatives over the abortion issue and, although they agreed to provide parliamentary backing for a minority Conservative government, neither they nor the Agrarians would accept office. The political basis for this agreement was their common criticism of the former Labour

---

<sup>30</sup> In addition to the structural factors, two more specific points must be mentioned. First, in the late 1970s Labour faced a crisis of leadership which finally led to the replacement of Odvar Nordli by Gro Harlem Brundtland as leader and prime minister. Secondly, slumbering tensions within the Labour Party over Norway's NATO membership awoke. The Conservative camp could point an accusing finger at Labour radicalization and argue that there had been a break in the 1949 consensus on security policies. There were also opposing views in the Labour Party on West European 'Nachrüstung'.

<sup>31</sup> These organizational improvements are discussed in Kuhnle, Strøm, Svilsand, op. cit.

government, particularly their joint statement on its projected Long-Term Programme for 1981–85.

As the Conservative government took office, under Kaare Willoch, Norwegian oil production was in the midst of a strong upswing which would take it from an average of 407,000 barrels a day in 1979 to 506,000 in 1981, 648,000 in 1983 and 815,000 in 1985.<sup>32</sup> Exports of oil and natural gas almost doubled in value from 48.1 bn kroner in 1981 to 85.1 bn kroner in 1985, and their combined share of total exports rose from 15.6 per cent in 1978 to 30.8 per cent in 1981 and 36.2 per cent in 1985. Government taxes and excises on petroleum production rocketed from 12.9 per cent of central government tax revenue in 1979 to 36.1 per cent in 1985. As we shall see in a moment, these favourable external conditions were more decisive for the economic policies of the Conservatives than they like to admit.

### The Conservative Strategy

The main aims of the new government were to curb inflation, improve competitiveness and to spur economic growth. In pursuit of these goals, it was deemed necessary to reduce growth in public spending; to cut taxes for higher-income households and the business sector; and to deregulate markets, especially in the strongly regulated areas of credit and housing. The argument rested on the well-known neo-liberal logic, with a strong emphasis on traditional supply factors. Reduced growth in government spending was assumed to have a positive impact on inflation, while at the same time making tax cuts possible. Tax cuts, in turn, would increase the incentives for work and investment and weaken claims for higher wages; and these effects—together with the greater efficiency allowed by market deregulation—would boost productivity and competitiveness and curb inflation.

These proposals were in line with the attack on the Norwegian model, launched as the blue wave was taking off. The economic and redistributive policies carried out earlier by Labour and centre-right governments had implied that welfare should be provided for everybody, regardless of income, social status or geographical location, through the public sector institutions and subsidization of housing and other necessities. To achieve this, redistributive tax policies, a regulated housing market and governmental control over credit policy were regarded as essentials. It was these pillars of the postwar Norwegian model that the Conservative government set out to transform. Although many of the changes that the Willoch government pursued during its early years were of an incremental nature, they clearly modified the direction of Norwegian society in a number of respects.

---

<sup>32</sup> These data on the oil sector in this section stem—unless otherwise stated—from Rune Skarstein, 'Opec-schizofreni', *Verdighet* 17, 1986, pp. 162–70. Oil rents in 1981 were about 15 per cent of GDP, compared with about 5 per cent in Britain. Margaret Thatcher made good use of British oil revenues to ward off criticism of her neo-liberal policies. One might ask why Norwegian Labour was not equally successful in thus defending its position in 1979 and 1980. The answer is that by 1979 the blue wave had already been released. Even in 1979–1981 Labour was too frightened of repeating some of the excesses of the early 1970s and there was no real 'political business cycle' before the 1981 election.

First, in every budget from 1982 onwards the government took steps to restrain the growth of the public sector and to reduce taxes for higher incomes and for firms. As a consequence of the budget cuts, growth of public consumption declined from 5.5–6 per cent in 1980–81 to 4–4.5 per cent in 1982–83, while growth of private consumption remained at a modest level or picked up somewhat. More important, perhaps, was the change in attitude towards public-investment activities. Thanks to a rather restrictive policy on the activities of local governments, their investments declined by 3 per cent per annum in real terms between 1981 and 1983. The growth of central-government investment also slowed down, while private investments expanded at a somewhat faster rate than in the late 1970s. Thus, the government managed in some degree to change the growth pattern from one that was driven by the public sector, especially local government, to one that was driven by the private sector.

However, massive oil rents made it possible to cut taxes by a larger amount than what accrued from the squeeze on the public sector. Taxes on income and property were reduced from 16.3 per cent of total central-government tax revenues in 1980 to only 9 per cent in 1985. The higher income groups derived by far the greatest benefit from these cuts, since they involved a considerable reduction of tax progression. In the early 1980s the large revenues from oil exports gave rise to considerable surpluses on current accounts, which increased from 4.1 bn kroner in 1982 to 14.6 bn in 1983, 14.4 bn in 1984 and 25.6 bn in 1985. These surpluses implied increasing liquidity in the private banking system.

The essence of the Conservative government's policies towards the financial system was, on the one hand, to repeal direct regulations on private bank lending and, on the other hand, to launch a major attack on the state banks which had played such a crucial role in Labour's economic policy until the late 1970s. While lending from private banks increased from 12.1 bn kroner in 1982 to 52.4 bn kroner in 1985,<sup>33</sup> the share of state banks was rapidly reduced from 17 to 7 per cent. At the same time, the government took steps to heighten the importance of the stock market, which up to then had been rather 'sluggish', as a source of fresh capital to firms. Under new tax rules the volume of transactions at the Oslo Stock Exchange quadrupled from 1.7 to 7 bn kroner between 1981 and 1983, and the average share price climbed 70 per cent. Public interest in the activities of the stock exchange sharpened enormously, and a number of parvenu 'raiders' became popular figures in the media. Furthermore, the Revised National Budget of 1983 stipulated that under certain conditions foreign banks should henceforth be allowed to set up business in Norway.

As for housing policy, deregulation of major segments of the market soon brought down the number of cooperative flats under price control from 170,000 to 80,000. This made price adjustments inevitable in the remaining part of the cooperative market—a full doubling

<sup>33</sup> Current-account and bank-lending statistics according to the Norwegian national budget 1987: *Stortingensmelding* (Parliamentary Report) No 1, 1987, pp. 209, 235.

taking place in 1982–83. By 1983, privatization was becoming an enormously profitable operation for house owners, as parliament passed a law which allowed rented flats in existing buildings, of which many were under price control, to be converted into privately owned housing. In Oslo alone, the number of price-regulated rented flats was halved in a few years—although this figure also includes houses subject to urban renewal. Generally speaking, the reforms of the housing market enjoyed quite widespread public support, probably because many people felt that they had made them better off and widened their freedom of choice. The latter may have been true, but the former impression was to a large extent an illusion, since the surge of demand for housing made all units more expensive. The losers in the game were newcomers to the market, young people, especially those on low incomes or in central areas such as Oslo, who found it more and more difficult to find accommodation that they could afford.

In macroeconomic terms the Conservatives had broken with the general counter-cyclical stance of Norwegian economic policy. The 1978–79 austerity had actually still been counter-cyclical, since it had operated in a phase of weak world economic recovery. But in 1979–80 oil prices once more escalated and the world economy faced a new recession. Despite the fact that Norway was earning higher oil incomes during an international downturn, austerity was continued through the crisis of 1982–83. Economic policies had become pro-cyclical.

#### The Recession and Labour's Counterattack

Within a relatively short period the Conservative government managed to change the course of Norwegian society. However, its policies also created new problems and political reactions which it had not foreseen. Most important, perhaps, was the fact that the government's rather restrictive budget policy, especially in relation to local government, was carried out in a period of worldwide recession. In 1981–82 average GDP growth in OECD Europe did not exceed 1 per cent on an annual basis. Firms began to face problems of surplus capacity, and large numbers of workers were laid off. During 1982–83 the number of full-time workers in Norwegian manufacturing industry declined by 6.5 per cent, or four to five times as much as in the preceding five years. At the same time, growth in public-sector employment slowed down and the rate of unemployment doubled from 1.7 per cent in 1979 to a postwar record of 3.3 per cent in 1983. The rate would be even higher if the growing number of people in work training were to be included. For the fact is that the Conservative government tried to relieve some of the effects of unemployment by resorting to the Swedish method of active manpower policies—that is, by increasing the number of reschooling courses, allocating extra funds to education, and so on. In at least one other respect—which contrasts strongly with Thatcherite policies in Britain—they strengthened the welfare-state safety net, as they decided to increase the maximum period of entitlement to unemployment benefit from forty to eighty weeks (as opposed to increasing social-security payments).

Slower growth in public spending and investments implied slower growth in public welfare activities, a problem which became especially pronounced in the health sector. The government responded by increasing

the prices of health services (making patients pay some of the costs) and by allowing private firms to enter the market. However, these reforms, especially the former, were rather ill-conceived. Private clinics have experienced financial problems, since the public is generally not willing to pay the higher fees.

Another area where the government failed was interest rates. In 1983 the real bank lending rate stood at approximately 6 per cent, compared with an average of 1 per cent in the previous decade. Together with the higher prices in the housing market, this increased the cost of living for the great majority of people, and the difficulties of young people and low-income groups in the housing market began to come to the attention of social workers and the media.

Two events were decisive in bringing austerity to an end. In the spring of 1983 the centre parties decided that the crisis had become so grave that they had to take action. The Christian Party managed to swallow its objections to the Conservatives' liberal position on abortion, and the leader of the Agrarians, J.J. Jakobsen, signalled that the time was ripe for a coalition government. After agreement on this was reached in June 1983, the new administration began to concern itself more with the welfare state and the fate of rural areas. But the turn came too late to deflect a massive critique of the government that resulted in a serious setback for the coalition parties in the 1983 local elections. The stage was set for expansionary pro-cyclical policies through the 1983-1986 world economic boom.

### The Willoch Boom

Many basic policies of the Conservative minority government continued after the 1983 elections. Tax cuts for companies and high income groups, as well as fiscal incentives to stock-market trading, were maintained in the 1984-86 budgets. But the restrictive attitude towards local government activity, especially investments, did not survive. Between 1983 and 1986, public real investment grew at an annual rate close to 5 per cent, having declined between 1981 and 1983. At the same time, a boom in the world economy had positive consequences for Norwegian exports and industrial production. With the rise in foreign and domestic demand, unemployment gradually declined to its pre-Willoch level, reaching 2 per cent of the labour force in 1986.

The new government continued the previous efforts to deregulate the credit market by lifting direct regulations on bank and insurance company lending in early 1984. Later in the year, foreign exchange controls were eased, and it became much easier for foreign citizens to buy shares in Norwegian firms. By early 1985 seven foreign banks had been authorized to operate in Norway. Finally, in September 1985, government control of interest rates was abolished. In incomes policy the government relied more on the market mechanism, with the result that wage drift accounted for a larger share of total wage increases in the years 1979-86 than in any other period since the war. Certainly this must be understood in the light of the weakening of LO, since the proportion of organized workers in the labour force has been

declining and now stands at little more than 60 per cent—high by international standards, but significantly lower than the 80 per cent prevailing in Sweden and Finland. However, this policy prevented any success in improving competitiveness, which was a main policy goal of the government.

The combination of internal and external stimuli to the economy, under a government whose deregulation policies were designed to break the main pillars of the Norwegian model, produced a range of effects without parallel since the war. The household savings rate turned negative in both 1985 and 1986, as private consumption picked up during 1984 and rocketed by 16 per cent between 1984 and 1986. Much of this was due to the liberalization and very rapid growth of credit, both within and outside the banking sector, and to a tax system which allowed interest payments to be deducted from taxable income. It is quite evident that high-income groups, especially the new middle classes of the private sector, accounted both for the major share of increased private consumption and for most of the consumption-oriented lending of private banks, often used to finance the purchase of cars, boats and other luxury durables. The stock market also boomed, as much of the rest of bank lending went into financial and stock-exchange speculation. Thus the volume of stock transactions rose to 32 bn kroner in 1985 from a mere 2 bn in 1981. Between mid 1983 and mid 1986 the average share price increased by 60 per cent, and the value of transactions in bonds and bank certificates climbed from 5.8 bn kroner in 1983 to 103.3 bn kroner in 1986.

Oil revenues were again a crucial condition for tax cuts. Although the government consistently refused any cooperation with OPEC, it made Norwegian policies dependent upon OPEC's ability to keep oil prices high by restraining the output of member countries. And indeed, total OPEC production of oil fell from 30.9 million barrels a day in 1979 to only 16 million a day in 1985, whereas the production of non-OPEC Western countries rose from 19.8 million barrels a day to 24.9 million a day in the same period. Norway, Britain and Mexico benefited the most, contributing 55 per cent of the non-OPEC increase in output during these years. Norwegian oil production doubled from 407,000 barrels a day in 1979 to 815,000 barrels in 1985.

The 1985 parliamentary election took place in the middle of the boom. Although support for the three governing parties was somewhat down compared with 1981, it held up much better than in the local elections two years earlier. The decline was sharpest in peripheral areas (especially the north, which was not so much affected by the boom) and least marked in the central areas of the country. Labour's campaign focused on the high interest rates, the dismal living standards of old-age pensioners, bottlenecks in the health sector, and the housing problems of young families. The now tiny Liberal Party, concentrating heavily on environmental issues, announced that it would support a Labour government, but it lost its two seats and dropped out of parliament for the first time since 1884. As a consequence, the centre-right coalition continued in office, but as the hostage of the small populist right-liberal Progress Party whose two seats held the balance

of power. And it was at just this moment that things started to happen in the international oil business.

Until the middle of 1984 Norway followed Britain's pricing of North Sea oil. In October, however, about half a year before the Statfjord C platform was due to come on stream with a capacity of 250,000 barrels a day, the problem of overproduction could no longer be postponed and Norway announced a cut in its reference price of 1.5 dollars a barrel. This step triggered a price war on the international oil market, culminating in the dramatic falls of late 1985 and early 1986. The government contributed to these price falls through its schizophrenic attitude to OPEC: on the one hand, it knew that OPEC's high-price policy and self-imposed production constraints (particularly by Saudi Arabia) formed an essential basis of Oslo's economic policies; on the other hand, it had no doubt that any cooperation or even contact with OPEC would strongly antagonize the United States and other members of the International Energy Agency, as well as offending the pro-Israeli sentiments of some members of the Cabinet. This insoluble dilemma undermined one of the main conditions of the government's economic policy—free riding on the high oil prices.

By early 1986 it had become fairly evident to observers that the government had lost control over the economy. Declining oil prices in the winter of 1985–86 strongly suggested that the current account would turn from a comfortable surplus in 1985 to a large deficit in 1986. In its annual report on Norway, the OECD severely criticized the expansionist fiscal policy, the loss of control over credit policies, and the failure to reduce transfers or to end the tax-deductibility of interest payments. With regard to the problem of transfers, it should be noted, first, that the agricultural sector of small low-productivity units is subsidized to the tune of 2 per cent of GDP, and second, that the differential pricing of electricity involves a substantial but less visible form of support to the energy-hungry firms of the export enclave.

Given the diversity of interest groups behind the three coalition parties, the government could not bring itself to propose major changes either in the transfer system (which would have affected important sections of the centre parties' electorate) or in the tax system (which would have harmed the high-income brackets on which the Conservatives partly rely). Then, in April 1986, the Conservative Party supported a lockout in the iron/metal sector (including shipyards and offshore deliveries) that had been declared by the Norwegian Employers' Federation (NAF). The centre parties were less enthusiastic, while the whole labour movement mobilized against it and won a great deal of sympathy. Clearly, in a situation of full employment with much of the manufacturing sector producing at full capacity, this affair was a grave tactical mistake on the part of the NAF leadership, which forced often reluctant member firms into a costly adventure. As the losing side, NAF had to accept both wage increases and a reduction of the normal working week from 40 to 37.5 hours. The leader of NAF subsequently resigned.

The outcome was also a moral setback for the government, not least

because it reduced international confidence by delivering a very generous wage settlement against a difficult backdrop of falling oil prices. Finally, in April 1986, amid wild speculation unleashed by the financial sector against the Norwegian krone, the government lost a parliamentary vote over a minor tax increase on petrol, and—gladly it would seem—withdrew from office. It was replaced by a minority Labour government in May.

### The Right in Power: A Balance Sheet

In terms of short- and medium-range economic policy, it is fair to say that the Willoch governments did some very strange things—pro-cyclical budgets, extreme deregulation of credit markets—which a Labour government would probably have avoided. After all, Labour was still deeply rooted in traditional welfare-state Keynesianism and maintained close links with the corps of applied economics specialists employed in the state apparatus. However, the main differences in the rationale of economic policy are to be found elsewhere. For Willoch's policies involved deliberate actions for a long-term transformation of the institutional structure and the working of the economic and social system.

A number of structural changes also benefited Conservative strategy. To some extent further internationalization of the Norwegian economy is blurring the distinction between sheltered and exposed sectors, as more firms than ever before produce for both national and international markets or are exposed to competition from imports. Since the early 1970s the size and velocity of short-term capital flows in the world economy have exploded beyond all recognition, making it very difficult for any country with a mixed economy to insulate itself from their impact. Large Norwegian banks, moreover, have been very keen to engage in international financial activities, currency broking, and so on. Another important structural change has to do with the growth of new middle classes in all kinds of private activities, especially in financial and other service activities. Not surprisingly, these strata have leaned towards the Conservative Party.

When the Conservative government came to power, it was almost universally acknowledged that earnings from the oil and gas sector would be sufficient to secure a comfortable surplus on the current account for at least the rest of the century. Important parts of the financial and industrial community, with strong links to the Conservative Party, advocated policies which implied that Norway should base its development on two strategies: capital exports, organized by the private banks, and a high-tech, high-income manufacturing industry under private ownership, financed partly through the banking sector and partly through the stock market. However, to make this viable in the long run, the banking sector, which for long had suffered from Labour's regulation policies, would have to be fortified at the expense of state banks, and the stock market and the social strata connected to it would have to be revitalized and strengthened. As we have seen, Labour's fumbling in the late 1970s gave the Conservatives a golden opportunity to mobilize for such policies. After 1981, the Willoch



government supported such institutional changes in various ways—for instance, by facilitating mergers in the financial and industrial sectors, and by supporting R & D and innovation in the private sector and cooperation among selected firms.

Did the Conservative government succeed in its aims? It clearly did so in strengthening the private banks and in giving new life to the stock market and the financial community in general. There could be no better illustration of this than the employment statistics. Between 1983 and 1986, in spite of the boom, employment hardly grew at all in the manufacturing sector, while in the financial sector and other business services—which traditionally accounted for a small share of total jobs—it increased by more than 40 per cent. Furthermore, although precise figures are hard to come by, the invigoration of the stock market led to a number of mergers both within and between the financial and industrial sectors. *New* shares, however, far from dominating stock-exchange transactions, actually make up a quite modest proportion of total investment in the industrial sector. Thus, while the volume of transactions in nominal terms rose fifteenfold between 1981 and 1986, the nominal value of new shares did no more than double. Between 1981 and 1985 new shares on average accounted for 12.5 per cent of investment in the manufacturing sector. In 1981–82, banks and financial institutions provided nearly half of gross investment in manufacturing industry, while in 1984–85 this share declined to about 10 per cent.<sup>34</sup>

The major achievement of the Willoch years, then, was the rise of a speculation economy in which it became far more profitable to engage in asset-stripping, or in home-ownership changes, than to create new real assets in the industrial sector. This did not necessarily run counter to the long-term objectives of the Conservative Party. The explosion of private consumption, particularly within the new middle classes, may be interpreted as an attempt to broaden and strengthen the class base of the Conservative Party.

In terms of macroeconomic policies, the government was less successful. There was no improvement of competitiveness, in spite of several devaluations that mainly led to higher inflation than in other OECD countries. There was little restructuring of the manufacturing sector that could provide a solid basis for the current-account balance without relying on high oil prices. Full employment was attained in 1986 but only at the expense of a large deficit on the current account, very much like in the United States.

#### 4. The Present Stalemate

Attacks on several aspects of the Norwegian model—the state banks and the regulation of the housing market—were a constant feature of the Willoch years, as it moved from pro-cyclical fiscal policies, through a new consumption boom, to its inglorious collapse brought on by sharply deteriorating external conditions. The new Labour

---

<sup>34</sup> *Penger og kreditt* (Bank of Norway Quarterly) 4/1987, p. 150.

government formed in May 1986 lived through a difficult first year, but in June 1987 the three major non-socialist parties—after six months of wavering negotiations—finally gave up their attempts to bring it down. Thus Labour governed as a minority thanks to continuing fragmentation within the non-socialist camp. For their part, the Conservatives no longer faced a challenge only from the centre parties, but also from the far-right Progress Party. They could not do without the support of the centre parties, and these increasingly became concerned about the growth of the speculation economy, the problems of financing the welfare state, and the difficulties facing newcomers in the housing market. But as soon as the Conservatives tried to reach a compromise with the centre parties on these issues, the Progress Party was there to criticize them from a more consistent neo-liberal perspective.<sup>35</sup>

The 1980s were reminiscent of the 1920s in the sense that there was a lack of alternative policies. In the 1920s most socialist parties held that deflation was the only possible policy within capitalist society, but during the 1930s the Labour Parties of Denmark, Sweden and Norway launched an offensive whose effects were primarily ideological and political. The alternative strategy bolstered a parliamentary alliance in which the representatives of farmers' interests supported Labour's reformist policies. It implied no break with capitalism, nor any serious implementation of Keynesian 'deficit spending', but it was still notably different from the bourgeois deflationary policies.

In the 1930s Labour successfully played its reformist card in a situation of high unemployment but no very pressing external constraints. Broad strata of low-income earners were ready, particularly after World War II, to absorb the whole range of modern consumer goods, many of which could be produced within the country. By the time of the 1970s crisis Norway's industrial economy was more vulnerable as a result of its integration in a specialized Fordist international production system, and tariff barriers were much lower than in the 1930s.

As for economic policies in the period after May 1986, the Labour government found itself in a situation which, in many ways, was analogous to that of late 1977. The need for austerity once again seemed overwhelming, only this time it was supposed to help the economy recover from the non-socialist government's pro-cyclical excesses of 1983–85. Another similarity was that in the 1986–88 period Norway

---

<sup>35</sup> In June 1987 the Conservative Party tried to compromise to satisfy the demands, especially of the Agrarians, whereas the Progress Party stood firmly on its neo-liberal opposition to large agricultural transfers, explicitly defending Labour's 'responsible' incomes policies. In this way, it was said, the Progress Party itself gained trust as a responsible force. However, its breakthrough in the local elections of September 1987 was just as much due to fairly overt signals of hostility towards the growing numbers of coloured political refugees and asylum-seekers in Norway. Following these elections the Conservatives and the Progress Party held majorities together in many towns, including Oslo. This creates more uneasiness for the Conservatives, but the populist Progress Party, though still increasing its support, is bound to face trouble in the long run as it engages in 'responsible' day-to-day politics.

still had full employment while facing harsh external constraints.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the differences between the two periods are more important. In 1977 the main elements of the Norwegian model were still intact, whereas after 1986 much of the model was dismantled. Deregulation of financial markets and a squeeze on the state banks have left the Labour government with fewer instruments of credit and monetary policy than they had in the late 1970s when the challenge was to adjust from the early 1970s consumption boom. In point of fact, the 1973–81 period as a whole was quite a successful case of counter-cyclical policy.

### Labour's 'Turning Operation'

The Willoch government had changed many expectations about future Norwegian developments. Labour tried to devise a set of economic policies that would readjust some of these expectations. These policies became known as Labour's 'turning operation'. We shall here survey some of its main elements: high interest rates, a tax reform, a 'wage law'—and an attempt to reduce the tightness of the labour market. The latter attempt turned out to be fatal for Labour.

The oil price collapse during the winter of 1986 and the speculation fever of spring 1986, including withdrawal of foreign capital and forward-buying by Norwegian firms, ended in devaluation of the Norwegian currency in May. Although flexible exchange rates had prevailed internationally for fifteen years, and although a number of competitive devaluations had been effected in the preceding decade, this was the first time since the war that a mechanism of currency speculation had influenced the country's economy. Thus, in the 1975–79 period, the large deficit had been financed mainly by central government, with no need for a large interest differential between Norway and the international capital markets. From 1986 onwards, however, the government relied mainly on the private sector to finance the current-account deficit. This required the central bank to keep the short-term interest rate above the world average, since only in this way would Norwegian firms have incentives to borrow abroad and non-residents be encouraged to place their money in Norway. As long as Oslo's economic policies are recognized as 'responsible', a relatively small interest-rate differential will be enough. But if there is fear of a new devaluation, the differential has to be increased. In this sense, the government is a hostage to international rentiers, and has less autonomy in monetary policies.<sup>37</sup>

The Labour government argued that the interest rate would come down as soon as pressure against the currency ceased. The fact that

---

<sup>36</sup> This represents a marked difference from most other West European countries, even the peak unemployment of 3.3 per cent in the early 1980s being well below the 10 per cent average elsewhere. According to Göran Therborn, *Why Some Peoples Are More Unemployed than Others*, Verso, London 1986, Norway's success in this respect was even more remarkable than Sweden's, since the Norwegian employment and participation rates grew even faster between 1973 and 1985.

<sup>37</sup> A relevant comparison would be the dilemma of earlier British Labour governments, with their ambivalent relationship to the financial communities of the City of London.

this did not happen until 1989 suggests that there are additional domestic reasons for the high interest rate. Private banks were not at all able to support a government policy of lower interest rates. Credit expansion following deregulation and setbacks in the economy since 1986 caused large losses for many banks, and interest rates were kept high as banks tried to recover losses by an increase in the interest-rate margin. The banks' ability to raise margins in a period of declining demand for credit clearly shows that deregulation had not brought financial markets closer to perfect competition. Given these external and internal factors, it seems that the government was content with the inclusion of a high interest rate as part of its policy strategy. Since the parliamentary deadlock made it impossible to secure backing for a coherent austerity policy, the interest rate was after all one of the few instruments that remained available.

As for fiscal policies, the Conservatives opposed increased taxes, the centre parties went for unchanged taxes and no large cuts in government spending, while Labour in turn was willing to accept higher taxes, both to constrain inflation and to maintain the level of public expenditure. However, in late 1987 Labour and the centre parties reached agreement on a tax reform that somewhat reduced the gains (a negative post-tax real interest rate) of credit-financed consumption, and increased the burden on those in the high-income strata with large debts. The Conservatives and the Progress Party opposed the reform.<sup>38</sup>

Another important element of Labour's economic policy was a 'wage law' introduced in April 1988, and renewed in Spring 1989 with effect until April 1990. This policy aimed at bringing down inflation and interest rates and improving cost competitiveness more quickly than by relying on market forces alone. It also proves that at least one feature of the economic policies of the 'Norwegian model' has survived the neo-liberal wave of the 1980s. Earlier wage freezes had simply been government actions, cancelling the next round of wage negotiations for all wage earners. In April 1988 something different happened: LO and NAF passed a very moderate wage settlement, and via the close contacts between LO and the government this settlement was generalized by law for all wage earners, effectively barring any possibility for the non-LO organizations to reach better terms. Such a corporatist incomes policy was very popular with business (including at an international level, where pressure on the krone ceased), but it further alienated important sections of the new middle classes from Labour. Since the accord also blocked local wage drift, it even became unpopular among LO members in manufacturing industry.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> The Conservatives later changed their attitude towards tax reform. In May 1990 the Conservatives and the centre parties, now in government, announced a new tax reform in the spirit of the 1987 reform, but involving larger reductions in the value of interest-rate deductibility.

<sup>39</sup> In the 'blue wave' of the late 1970s there was, as we have seen, a connection between the wage freeze and growing support for the Conservatives. There was a similar pattern in the late 1980s, but the Conservatives were unable to present more than minor and ambivalent disputes concerning the law, which after all has strong support

Labour's 'turning operation' of 1986–89 was quite successful in improving the current-account imbalance and bringing down inflation. Higher oil prices and increased oil production again provided a helping hand, and the current account showed a surplus again in 1989, while inflation was down to 4.5 per cent. However, the success was only partial, as unemployment reached 5 per cent in 1989—much higher than the previous peak in 1983–84.

It seems clear that the Labour policy makers were conscious that some degree of unemployment was needed to achieve the goals of the turning operation. In 1986–87 the labour market was extremely tight, with unemployment below 2 per cent. It was considered necessary that the large number of new rich 'yuppies' should feel a degree of employment insecurity. Some unemployment was also expected in sheltered and 'home-competing' sectors like construction and retail sales. But what Labour elites did not anticipate was that the turning operation legitimated lay-offs and unemployment at a more general level. The rhetoric of the turning operation actually broke down some of the Norwegian 'institutionalized commitment' to full employment.<sup>39</sup> Business leaders began to view unemployment as positive, as a necessary 'catharsis'. Firms simply abandoned any strategy of labour hoarding, laying off a number of allegedly superfluous workers.

The rise in unemployment proved to be a distressing fact for the Labour campaigners in the 1989 general election.<sup>40</sup> Again it shows that Labour's economic policies are not easily explained by a simple election cycle hypothesis. In 1965, 1981 and 1989 restrictive fiscal

---

<sup>39</sup> (*cont.*)

from business and NAF. Thus, the 'dark-blue wave' of the late 1980s consists of the Progress Party gaining a large number of new supporters (including many former Labour voters) with its wild criticisms of the law. For a more detailed analysis, see Lars Mjøsset, 'Norway's Full-Employment Oil Economy—Flexible Adjustment or Paralyzing Rigidities?', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 12, 4, 1989.

<sup>40</sup> Therborn, *Why Some Peoples Are More Unemployed than Others*; Manfred G. Schmidt, 'Politics of Unemployment', *West European Politics*, 7, 1984.

<sup>41</sup> A brief comparison with events in Sweden shows that the two most famous cases of Nordic social democracy have faced different problems since the mid 1980s. The Swedish Social-Democratic government produced a booming economy and was able to win renewed support in the 1988 election. The present Swedish problems seem connected to the fact that the government was not in a position to apply the traditional selective labour-market policy, a cornerstone of the 1960s Swedish model. Instead, general fiscal stimulus was applied, a policy which the famous Rehn/Meidner model of the 1960s was actually designed to avoid (see Lennart Erixon, 'Rehn-Meidnermodellen — en ny tredje väg', *LO-Tidningen*, 4, 26 January 1990.) The Swedish Labour government produced full employment, but the current-account position deteriorated dangerously and inflation rose above the OECD average. They soon found it necessary to tighten fiscal policies, being at the same time very dependent on a moderate wage settlement. The failure to combine these two objectives caused a minor government crisis in February 1990. Some months later the Norwegian labour-market parties successfully arrived at a very moderate incomes-policy settlement. Two reasons explain this difference. First, Swedish governments have always tried to avoid explicit intervention in incomes policies, so Sweden lacks the incomes-policy institutions (like a neutral 'national arbitrator' mediating between the parties) which have been standard features in Norway for a long time. Second, Sweden had full employment and plenty of labour-market bottlenecks, while the Norwegian settlement must be seen against the background of persistently high unemployment.

policies were pursued in election years. There was an expansionary turn during 1989 as a response to the alarming increase in unemployment, but it was too late and probably too weak to prevent a major setback for Labour.

In the general election of September 1989 the two largest parties (Conservative and Labour) were the major losers, while SV (advancing from 6 to 17 seats) won many former Labour voters, and the Progress Party (advancing from 2 to 22 seats) won a lot of former Conservative voters. As in the preceding period, the parliamentary majority lay with the non-socialist parties. After difficult negotiations the Conservatives and the centre parties agreed in October 1989 to form a minority government, led by the Conservative Party leader Jan P. Sysø. However, the conflicts between the centre parties and the much strengthened Progress Party, on whose parliamentary support the government has to rely, makes it difficult for the government to impose firm and coherent policies. Thus the stalemate continues.

## 5. What Remains of the Norwegian Model: Prospects for the 1990s

The economic strategy developed by the Labour governments in the early postwar years worked quite well until the 1970s. It enjoyed fairly widespread popular support, and in practice non-socialist administrations also followed it. Today, however, not much is left of the Norwegian model. For instance, the single most important goal of Labour's strategy, full employment, has been abandoned. At the time of writing (May 1990), the level of unemployment in Norway is between 5 and 6 per cent—somewhat lower than the EC average, but not qualitatively different from the level in many other capitalist countries. Also, the de facto insulation of Norwegian financial markets from the international environment, and the associated policy of 'credit socialism', on which so much depended, has been cancelled. In many respects, the difference between the economic policy regime in Norway and the regimes of most other Western countries is vanishing.

A number of lasting achievements, however, may be noted. What has been dubbed the Nordic 'passion for equality' is visible at many levels. Concerning equality between the sexes, the brunt of the very high growth of labour-force participation since the early 1970s is accounted for by women, whose participation rate is now close to 70 per cent (compared with 86 per cent for men). Female employment is highest in the health and education systems. The former Labour government, headed by a woman and with a world record of eight female ministers out of eighteen, reached the headlines of the international press. It is true that, with the exceptions of Agriculture and Justice, women presided over 'soft' ministries like Health, Education and the Environment. But their strong presence was the result of a deliberate quota policy, fought for by the women's movement within the Labour Party. Recent electoral research shows a clear tendency towards increased support for the socialist parties among young women. Significantly, the present non-socialist government also

includes many women. Thus the trend started by Labour has now been generalized.

Norms of equality are also strong in the educational and health systems. There are very few private schools. Education at all levels is provided relatively cheaply to all who qualify. Equality also has a regional aspect. In contrast to the Swedish experience, the Norwegian social democrats have aimed at, and succeeded in maintaining, a certain level of population and employment in most rural areas. Even more important is the continuing ability to achieve moderate wage settlements within a centralized wage-bargaining framework. However, since the disappearance of other supporting policy measures—such as 'credit socialism'—economic management has been increasingly dependent on incomes policies.

Consequently, Labour today lacks both a coherent economic policy and the parliamentary and popular support necessary to develop the present policy stance in a radically new direction. To produce a new strategy Labour must tackle two important challenges. The first relates to the ongoing process of internationalization. Of course the Norwegian economy has always been highly internationalized with respect to trade, but the creation of the EC internal market and progression toward financial and monetary integration makes Norway much more vulnerable than before to developments in European and international markets. The second challenge relates to the relatively low growth rate and recent increases in unemployment. As pointed out earlier, Norway has traditionally maintained—and still maintains—a relatively high ratio of investment to GDP compared with most other countries of the Western world. In spite of this, results are far from impressive, both in terms of growth rates and job creation. These trends will not change unless investment is redirected from its traditional use in capital-intensive, low value-added industries towards less capital-intensive industries with a higher value-added ratio. This is not an easy task, since there are strong interests connected to the existing distribution of investments.

### The Question of EC Membership

The question of Norwegian membership of the EC has been raised again by the EC's drive to create a single European market by 1992, and by Austria's application for full membership. But the Labour Party has a troubled memory of the splits that haunted the Party in 1972, and has been reluctant to consider seriously the question of membership. The Conservative Party strongly promoted membership in its campaign before the 1989 election; but as a result of that election it found itself in a governing coalition with the centre parties, a major condition for which was that the government should not apply for membership. Thus, during the period of Labour government, 1986–89, and during that of the present non-socialist government, the strategy has been one of adjustment to the changes that arise as the EC prepares for the internal market, but without considering membership. Instead, both the non-socialist government and Labour put their faith in the so-called EC–EFTA track. If these negotiations fail, there may be a parliamentary majority in favour of membership. In this case a crisis

of government is inevitable, since the Agrarians are firmly opposed. Among the non-socialist parties, the Conservatives, and recently also the Progress Party, firmly favour such an application, and Labour may also end up in favour. For Labour, the position of the Swedish Social Democrats, with whom it has strong ties, will be crucial.

If Norway ends up applying for EC membership, the controversy will probably not be as great as it was in the early 1970s. Among the three groups that made up the anti-EC alliance, only one, that comprising rural interests, especially those linked to farming, is still firmly opposed to membership. Among both industrial workers and well-educated urban middle classes, opposition to EC membership is clearly weaker. According to recent polls, of those who have made up their mind on the EC question, the number opposing membership has declined from about two thirds to approximately one half. However, Norwegian membership is unthinkable without a referendum, and in that case there will be a new struggle to influence public opinion, and consequently the outcome is still open.

In economic terms the difference between the proposed EFTA-EC arrangement and full EC membership will be small. In any case, the trends toward increasing Norwegian dependence on development in European and international financial markets will continue. Consequently, a return to a more active monetary policy will not be possible in the foreseeable future. It is still unclear whether the EC-EFTA arrangements or EC membership will necessitate harmonization of indirect taxes and excises. If such harmonization is effective, estimates show that it will be difficult to finance the existing level of public investment, consumption and transfers to the private sector ('the welfare state'). Evidently, if an independent monetary policy is impossible, and the room for manoeuvre in fiscal policy is severely restricted, it will be even more difficult than before to follow a national economic policy that secures the traditional goals of full employment and maintenance of population and employment in the rural areas. The room for an independent industrial strategy may turn out to be severely restricted by the internal-market plans. In that case, the only instrument left will be incomes policy.

### Economic Restructuring

The Labour Party is probably still in a better position than the non-socialist parties to secure support for restrictive incomes policies from the trade unions. But it must be expected that this will lead to additional strains on the LO-Labour relationship. By early 1990 LO had for two years submitted to a wage-restraint strategy. Real wages have declined. Many of LO's younger members have suffered a very substantial loss of real disposable income, which has declined even more than real wages. Thus, a large number of union members in their thirties and forties are now manifestly dissatisfied with LO's unconditional support for Labour. By means of its turning operation of 1986-89, Labour tried to act in the general 'national interest', but in so doing the Party did not succeed in improving the social and economic situation of core groups of LO members. LO's new leader,



Yngve Haagenzen, is a Party member, but his position is more independent than that of earlier LO leaders. LO may prove to be less inclined than in the past to save the government's economic policy through wage restraint. After all, the last social-democratic government was not able to secure full employment, despite the wage law. LO's willingness to compromise is also undermined by the growth of two independent trade-union confederations (for white-collar workers and academics). LO is lagging behind in the competition for members: only a quarter of new recruits to labour-market organizations in the period 1977-86 joined LO. While the proportion of non-organized workers in the labour force remained at around 43 per cent between 1966 and 1986, LO's share declined from 46 per cent to 35 per cent; other organizations increased their share from 13 per cent to 21 per cent in the same period.<sup>42</sup>

The problem of investment distribution relates primarily to the export enclave and agricultural sectors. As the export sector becomes increasingly developed, the need for cheap production factors grows more pressing, and this increases the pressure on the government to provide energy at low costs. A number of reasons, such as the maintenance of employment and the defence of 'competitiveness', are quoted to legitimize this demand. In the debates of the last few years on low electricity prices the Chemical Workers' Union has aligned both with the employers and with the population of the one-plant towns to defend these privileges. In the spring of 1989 they negotiated additional long-term contracts for electricity at very low prices. More recently the state-owned company Norsk Hydro has threatened to establish new production facilities abroad if it does not receive gas below world-market prices. The minister responsible has already reacted positively to this claim, although no decision has yet been taken (May 1990). The strength of the 'cheap energy mafia' in Norway is such that these industries will probably succeed in securing further subsidies, and hence expand at the expense of other less capital- and energy-intensive, but more employment-generating, industries.

The transfers to the agricultural sector—the highest in the world, relative to the number of farmers—are also much debated. Pressure from GATT to liberalize imports of agricultural products was accepted by Labour, but is opposed by the Agrarians who are in charge of agricultural policies in the present government. The problem here for Labour is that the Agrarians seem the most likely candidate if it wishes to find allies in parliament. Consequently, although there is scope for cooperation on many issues, the conflict over agrarian policies is a certain barrier to the formation of a Labour/Agrarian government.

As for new export industries, the technocratic turn to offensive 'open door' industrial policies is verbally supported by all parties. Specific fields of priority have been selected: information, offshore and materials technologies, ocean farming and biotechnology in general. New supporting bureaucracies are being set up and industrial parks are planned for the environs of the universities. But although the

---

<sup>42</sup> Arvid Fennefoss, *Lønustaker-organisering*, Oslo 1988.

government is thus joining its West European counterparts in the race for industrial restructuring,<sup>43</sup> the Norwegian system of education and innovation is itself being squeezed by restrictive budgetary policies. In its 1990 budget proposal, Labour argued for increased R&D spending, but the present Syse government decided to squeeze this item.

Another important factor concerns the relationship between structural policies and environmental issues, which certainly mobilized sections of the new middle classes from the early 1970s. Many studies have shown that public employees have strong sympathy for such issues, and with party-leader Brundtland having headed the UN Commission on environment and development, Labour rapidly introduced these themes into its party propaganda. The possibility of using North Sea resources in gas-fired power stations has to some extent relieved the government of some unpleasant trade-offs between new water-powered plants and the protection of scenic stretches of the Norwegian countryside. However, gas-fired power stations entail increased CO<sub>2</sub> pollution. Environmental organizations have already threatened action if construction work on gas-fired stations is started. The alternative, according to these groups, beyond the water-power versus gas-power debate, is reduced consumption of energy. This would clearly run counter to the interests of the export enclave. Furthermore, both the raw-materials industry and agriculture are among the major polluters. Thus, it appears that a consistent environmental strategy requires changes in structural policy that will be resisted by some of the politically and economically strongest pressure groups in Norway. To capitalize on these issues Labour will have to break with some of its traditional supporters. This appears unlikely, though not impossible.

### The Choice before Labour

In short, the Labour Party has to make some hard choices in the next few years with regard to the basis of its political and electoral support. One possibility is to continue 'muddling through', retaining close ties to the enclave and the groups benefiting from the traditional regional policies, while at the same time making small reforms in other areas (like taxation) to the extent that the political situation allows it. However, it is difficult to see how a policy of this type can lead to higher growth and a sufficient improvement in the employment situation. If, on the other hand, Labour starts to attack the privileges of the export enclave and the transfers to agriculture, fisheries and rural areas, then political tensions with LO and important sections of the population in the rural areas will increase. The significant question here is whether Labour can compensate by increasing its electoral support among other groups, especially the new middle classes. In which case Labour will compete more directly with the Conservatives.

---

<sup>43</sup> Gerd Junne, 'Der strukturpolitische Wandel zwischen den kapitalistischen Ländern', *Politisches Vierteljahrsheft* 25/2, 1984.

In Sweden, wage-earners' funds and improvements in the work environment were launched as reforms intended to unite blue-collar and office workers in the private sector. However, as has been pointed out, Norway has had a much more state-interventionist system, with a considerable degree of investment control. This may be one of the reasons why a reform akin to wage-earner funds has never been contemplated by the Labour Party. LO has recently begun to use the issue as a threat. In the autumn of 1987 it was mentioned in order to provoke some action against excessive stock-exchange speculation. In 1989 the matter was raised in the discussions about what unions actually have to gain from wage restraint. But the vague Norwegian proposals have never had the radical bent of the earliest Swedish proposals for wage-earner funds. On the other hand, the actually existing funds in Sweden are a greatly watered-down version of the original conception, so in a sense the SAP may be moving back towards its more moderate Norwegian sister-party.<sup>44</sup> Attempts by the Labour Party leadership to stage a 'debate on the notion of freedom', however, indicate that at the ideological level it is responding to the blue wave with concessions to liberal concepts of freedom that do not include ideas of economic democracy.<sup>45</sup>

It appears that increased support for the Labour Party among the new middle classes will depend on such issues as defence of the welfare state and of the environment. As noted, Gro Harlem Brundtland has given the Party some credibility in the latter field. Traditionally, the Labour Party has presented itself as a defender of the welfare state, but in recent years the difference between Labour and the non-socialist parties of the present government has diminished. To a considerable extent, the defence of the welfare state relates to the problem of state finance, which in turn relates to the question of reducing subsidies to the export enclave, agriculture and rural areas, as well as increasing the tax-base. In particular, if Norwegian membership of the EC or the outcome of the EC-EFTA negotiations necessitates a harmonization of indirect taxes in the long run, it will be impossible to defend the welfare state without launching reforms that reduce subsidies and transfers to other activities.

There exists a very interesting social parallel between the leading strata of the two largest parties. Conservative leaders are mainly lawyers and business economists, people with careers in private business, representing the managerial hierarchies. Labour leaders, on the other hand, mainly pursue careers in the public bureaucracies of state and local government. In a long-term perspective, the Conservatives have developed from a bureaucrat party to a class party, while Labour has developed from a class party to a bureaucrat party.<sup>46</sup> Representing

<sup>44</sup> See Jonas Pontusson, 'Radicalization and Retreat in Swedish Social Democracy', *NLR* 163, September–October 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Arne Overrein, 'Frihet, orden og sosialisme—merknader til Arbeiderpartiets "frihetekampanje"', *Vordager* 18, 1988.

<sup>46</sup> This alludes to a phrase coined by Norwegian historian Jens Arup Seip, who claimed in the early 1960s that the Norwegian state had developed from a 'bureaucrat state' to a 'one-party state'. As mentioned earlier, the Conservative Party in its first decades before 1905 was above all a party of bureaucratic state elites, an important Norwegian peculiarity.

private and public 'establishments', these two large parties are inert bodies. This leaves room for protest parties that organize their mobilization around new and unexpected problems, as both SV and the Progress Party have recently done.

Neither of the large parties can form new governments on their own. They both have to collaborate with other parties. If Labour returns to power, it will probably continue its traditional strategy of collaborating both to the left and to the right. Since a change of government will most likely be related to disagreements on EC membership, and since pro-EC forces are quite strong within Labour, collaboration with SV will be difficult. But one group of new problems may provide common ground. SV has gradually been transformed into a red-green party, and Labour is committed to environmentalism through the international activities of its leader. If, as seems likely, environmental problems become more central to the political agenda of the 1990s, then social democrats and socialists may begin to develop closer ties.

# **MAKE A DATE WITH DEMOCRACY**

*a day of debate and discussion  
organised by CHARTER 88  
at Friends Meeting House  
Euston Road, London  
10am - 5pm*

**JULY  
14**

Tickets (£5/£2.50 concs) and further information available from:

**CHARTER 88**  
 Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant  
 LONDON WCLX 6AP  
 sponsored by New Statesman and Society

*This debate about British democracy is supported by the following people:*

Citizens' Assembly, Campaign for Freedom of Information, National Council for Civil Liberties, European Movement, Socialist Society, Electoral Reform Society, Constitutional Reform Centre, Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform, Haldane Society for Socialist Lawyers, Labour Coordinating Committee, New Democrat International, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament & 'Sanity', 'Fortnight', 'Liberal Democrat News', 'Marxism Today', 'The Radical Quarterly', 'New Left Review', Radius-Hutchinson Publications, Article 19, 'Radical Wales', 'Radical Scotland', Common Voice.

Barbara Jeanne Fields

## Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America

Two years ago, a sports announcer in the United States lost his job because he enlarged indiscreetly—that is, before a television audience—upon his views about 'racial' differences. Asked why there are so few black coaches in basketball, Jimmy 'the Greek' Snyder remarked that black athletes already hold an advantage as basketball players because they have longer thighs than white athletes, their ancestors having been deliberately bred that way during slavery. 'This goes all the way to the Civil War,' Jimmy the Greek explained, 'when during the slave trading... the owner, the slave owner would breed his big black to his big woman so he could have a big black kid, you see.' Astonishing though it may seem, Snyder intended his remark as a compliment to black athletes. If black men became coaches, he said, there would be nothing left for white men to do in basketball at all. Embarrassed by such rank and open expression of racism in the most ignorant form, the network fired Jimmy the Greek from his job. Any fool, the network must have decided, should know that such things may be spoken in the privacy of the

locker-room in an all-white club, but not into a microphone and before a camera. Of course, Jimmy the Greek lays no claim to being educated or well informed. Before he was hired to keep audiences entertained during the slack moments of televised sports events, he was famous as a bookie. He claims expert knowledge about odds and point spreads, not about history, biology or human genetics. But those claiming to be educated—and employed on that basis—have proved to be just as superstitious as Jimmy the Greek. Belief in the biological reality of race outranks even astrology, the superstition closest to it in the competition for dupes among the ostensibly educated. Richard Cohen, the house liberal of the *Washington Post*, wrote a column defending the underlying assumption of Jimmy the Greek's remark, if not its specific content. According to Cohen, Jimmy the Greek was wrong for overestimating what can be accomplished by the deliberate breeding of human beings, not for believing in physical race. 'Back in my college days,' Cohen began, 'I dabbled in anthropology. In physical anthropology we had to do something called "racing and sexing" of skulls. That entailed looking at a skull and determining whether it was once a man or a woman—and which race.' The circular logic of first defining certain characteristics as 'racial', then offering differences in those same characteristics as proof that the 'races' differ, did not trouble him, even in retrospect. In matters of virtually religious faith, logic carries no weight. Cohen capped that shameful display with a tag that ought to have warned him of the intellectual quagmire into which he had strayed: 'Yes, Virginia, the races are physically different.'<sup>1</sup>

Most Americans, though perhaps few others, will recognize the allusion. Many years ago, a newspaper editor answered a query from a troubled child named Virginia, who was experiencing her first painful doubts that Santa Claus was a real person and who had written to the newspaper to get an authoritative answer. The answer came in a famous editorial entitled 'Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus.' Cohen spoke more truth than he realized in thus equating his own—and, presumably, his readers'—need to believe in race with a child's need to believe in Santa Claus. Anyone who continues to believe in race as a physical attribute of individuals, despite the now commonplace disclaimers of biologists and geneticists,<sup>2</sup> might as well also believe that Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the tooth fairy are real, and that the earth stands still while the sun moves.

Newspaper and television journalists are entitled to be as silly and irresponsible as they wish, and it usually does no harm, since nobody in his right mind pays attention to them. (Richard Cohen underlined his scientific illiteracy by speaking of 'white genes'—entities known to

<sup>1</sup> Richard Cohen, 'The Greek's Offense', *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, 25-31 January 1988

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, New York 1981, Richard Lewontin, Steven Rose and Leon Kamin, *Not in Our Genes*, New York 1984.

no geneticist that I am aware of.)<sup>3</sup> But in May of 1987, the Supreme Court of the United States provided a much more serious example—more serious precisely because it *was* the Supreme Court and not a half-baked journalist. The Supreme Court had to decide whether Jewish and Arab Americans could seek relief under civil-rights law for acts of discrimination against them. Instead of taking its stand on the principle that discrimination against anybody is intolerable in a democracy, the Court chose to ask whether Jews and Arabs are racially distinct from 'Caucasians'. If so, then civil-rights laws forbidding 'racial' discrimination might be applied to them. The Court decided that, because Jews, Arabs and a variety of nationalities were regarded as racial groups in the late nineteenth century, they may therefore be so considered today.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the Court knew no better way to rectify injustice at the end of the twentieth century than to re-enthroned the superstitious racial dogma of the nineteenth century. In fact, the Supreme Court had little choice, bound as it is by American precedent and history—bound, that is to say, by its participation in those rituals that daily create and re-create race in its characteristic American form. The Supreme Court acts, no less than Jimmy the Greek, within the assumptions, however absurd, that constitute racial ideology in the United States. Unfortunately, so do historians and other academic specialists, who vitally need to take a distance from these assumptions in order to do their job.

### The Single 'Race'

One of the most important of these absurd assumptions, accepted implicitly by most Americans, is that there is really only one race, the Negro race. That is why the Court had to perform intellectual contortions to prove that non-Negroes might be construed as members of races in order to receive protection under laws forbidding racial discrimination. Americans regard people of known African descent or visible African appearance as a race, but not people of known European

---

<sup>3</sup> Cohen is by no means alone. An NBC network broadcast during the spring of 1989, anchored by the gullible Tom Brokaw and vigorously defended by one of its producers in the columns of the *New York Times*, similarly affirmed the essence of Jimmy the Greek's instinctive prejudice. The broadcast featured an Israeli doctor who, by measuring muscular movements of world-class athletes, claimed to identify typical 'racial' characteristics. No one asked whether ordinary people use their muscles the same way world-class athletes do; that is, whether his experiment proved something about typical racial characteristics or something about exceptional athletes. Nor did anyone ask whether athletes classed as black are more likely than those classed as white to have learned their moves from coaches and fellow athletes also classed as black; that is, whether the experiment dealt with race or training. Needless to add, no one ventured to ask the most embarrassing question of all, the one that stumped the scientific racists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: how to assign the subjects of the experiments to one 'race' or the other without assuming the very racial distinction the experiment is supposed to prove? Try as they would, the scientific racists of the past failed to discover any objective criterion upon which to classify people; to their chagrin, every criterion they tried varied more within so-called races than between them. It is likely that Brokaw's neo-racist would find the same true of muscular movements had he the honesty and intelligence to pose the question.

<sup>4</sup> *St. Francis College, et al. v. Majid Ghaidan Al-Khazraji, and Shaare Tefila Congregation v. John William Cobb et al.*, 18 May 1987.

descent or visible European appearance. That is why, in the United States, there are scholars and *black* scholars, women and *black* women. Saul Bellow and John Updike are writers; Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison are *black* writers. George Bush and Michael Dukakis were candidates for president; Jesse Jackson was a *black* candidate for president.

Moreover, people in the United States do not classify as races peoples of non-European but also non-African appearance or descent, except for purposes of direct or indirect contrast with people of African descent; and even then, the terms used are likely to represent geography or language rather than biology: *Asian* or *Hispanic*.<sup>5</sup> Even when terms of geography designate people of African descent, they mean something different from what they mean when applied to others. My students find it odd when I refer to the colonizers of North America as *Euro-Americans*, but they feel more at ease with *Afro-Americans*, a term which, for the period of colonization and the slave trade, has no more to recommend it. Students readily understand that no one was really a European, since Europeans belonged to different nationalities; but it comes as a surprise to them that no one was an African either, since Africans likewise belonged to different nationalities.

A second absurd assumption inseparable from race in its characteristic American form takes for granted that virtually everything people of African descent do, think, or say is racial in nature. Thus, anyone who followed the news commentaries on the presidential election primaries of 1988 learned that, almost by definition, Afro-Americans voted for Jesse Jackson because of racial identification—despite polls showing that Jackson's supporters were far more likely than supporters of any other candidate to identify him with specific positions that they agreed with on issues that mattered to them. Supporters of the others regarded their men as interchangeable, and were likely to switch again and again, in response to slick advertising spots or disparaging rumours.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps most intellectually debilitating of all is a third assumption: namely, that any situation involving people of European descent and people of African descent automatically falls under the heading 'race relations'. Argument by definition and tautology thereby replaces argument by analysis in anything to do with people of African descent.

---

<sup>5</sup> That is not, of course, to deny the well-justified annoyance of Japanese-, Chinese-, Korean-, Vietnamese- and Indian-Americans at being classed together as *Asian-Americans* or, still more inaccurately, as simply *Asians*. Nor is it to overlook the nonsense that flourishes luxuriantly around the attempt to set terms of language and geography alongside the term that supposedly represents biological race. Survey-researchers for the United States government often ask 'Hispanics' whether they wish to be considered 'white' or 'black'. The resulting classifications can divide members of a single family. As often as not, the report of the results proceeds to distinguish *Hispanics* from *blacks* and *whites*. Moreover, the government regards Portuguese-speaking Brazilians as 'Hispanic' and requires that they so identify themselves when applying for a social security number, as the Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado discovered during a recent visit.

<sup>6</sup> *New York Times*, 10 March 1988, A26.



Probably a majority of American historians think of slavery in the United States as primarily a system of race relations—as though the chief business of slavery were the production of white supremacy rather than the production of cotton, sugar, rice and tobacco. One historian has gone so far as to call slavery 'the ultimate segregator'.<sup>7</sup> He does not ask why Europeans seeking the 'ultimate' method of segregating Africans would go to the trouble and expense of transporting them across the ocean for that purpose, when they could have achieved the same end so much more simply by leaving the Africans in Africa. No one dreams of analysing the struggle of the English against the Irish as a problem in race relations, even though the rationale that the English developed for suppressing the 'barbarous' Irish later served nearly word for word as a rationale for suppressing Africans and indigenous American Indians.<sup>8</sup> Nor does anyone dream of analysing serfdom in Russia as primarily a problem of race relations, even though the Russian nobility invented fictions of their innate, natural superiority over the serfs as preposterous as any devised by American racists.<sup>9</sup>

Loose thinking on these matters leads to careless language, which in turn promotes misinformation. A widely used textbook of American history, written by very distinguished historians, summarizes the three-fifths clause of the United States Constitution (article 1, section 2) thus: 'For both direct taxes and representation, five blacks were to be counted as equivalent to three whites.'<sup>10</sup> The three-fifths clause does not distinguish between *blacks* and *whites*—not even, using more polite terms, between black and white *people*. (Indeed, the terms *black* and *white*—or, for that matter, *Negro* and *Caucasian*—do not appear anywhere in the Constitution, as is not surprising in a legal document in which slang of that kind would be hopelessly imprecise.) The three-fifths clause distinguishes between *free Persons*—who might be of European or African descent—and *other Persons*, a euphemism for *slaves*. The issue at stake was whether slaveowning citizens would hold an advantage over non-slaveowning citizens; more precisely, whether slaves would be counted in total population for the purpose of apportioning representation in Congress—an advantage for slaveholders in states with large numbers of slaves—and of assessing responsibility for direct taxes—a disadvantage. The Constitution answered by saying yes, but at a ratio of three-fifths, rather than the five-fifths that slaveholders would have preferred for representation or the zero-fifths they would have preferred for taxation. When well-meaning people affirm, for rhetorical effect, that the Constitution declared Afro-Americans to be only three-fifths human, they commit

<sup>7</sup> John Anthony Scott, 'Segregation: A Fundamental Aspect of Southern Race Relations, 1800-1860', *Journal of the Early Republic* 4, Winter 1984, p. 425. Scott did not originate this preposterous assertion. Nevertheless, he endorses it enthusiastically.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, New York 1975, ch. 1; Leonard P. Liggio, 'English Origins of Early American Racism', *Radical History Review* 3, 1976.

<sup>9</sup> See Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor. American Slavery and Russian Serfdom*, Cambridge, Mass. 1987, pp. 170-91.

<sup>10</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, Leon F. Litwack et al., *The United States*, combined edition, 5th edition, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1982, p. 144.

an error for which American historians themselves must accept the blame.

When virtually the whole of a society, including supposedly thoughtful, educated, intelligent persons, commits itself to belief in propositions that collapse into absurdity upon the slightest examination, the reason is not hallucination or delusion or even simple hypocrisy; rather, it is ideology. And ideology is impossible for anyone to analyse rationally who remains trapped on its terrain.<sup>11</sup> That is why race still proves so hard for historians to deal with historically, rather than in terms of metaphysics, religion or socio- (that is, pseudo-) biology.

Nothing so well illustrates that impossibility as the conviction among otherwise sensible scholars that race 'explains' historical phenomena; specifically, that it explains why people of African descent have been set apart for treatment different from that accorded to others.<sup>12</sup> But *race* is just the name assigned to the phenomenon, which it no more explains than *judicial review* 'explains' why the United States Supreme Court can declare acts of Congress unconstitutional, or than *Civil War* 'explains' why Americans fought each other between 1861 and 1865.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> A well-known historian once illustrated this fact for me in the very act of denying it. Challenging me for having made a statement to the same effect in an earlier essay (Barbara J. Fields, 'Ideology and Race in American History', in *Rapport, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, New York 1982), he declared: 'Someone could accept the evidence that there is a racial disparity in IQ and still believe in integration.' Well-intentioned, but trapped in racial ideology, he cannot bring himself to question the scientific status of race itself, let alone IQ. Nor, although an accomplished user of statistical methods, can he perceive the fallacy of statistical studies claiming to have eliminated the social determinants of intelligence and isolated the genetic ones, while perforce using social criteria—there are no others—to assign subjects to their proper 'race' in the first place.

<sup>12</sup> Inseparable from this conviction is the reification of race that impels many scholars to adopt and impose on others, as a pious duty, the meaningless task of deciding whether race is more or less 'basic' to historical explanation than other—and similarly reified—categories; a waste of time to which I drew attention in 'Ideology and Race in American History', p. 158. Someone might as well undertake to decide in the abstract whether the numerator or the denominator is more important to understanding a fraction, instead of settling down to the more sensible task of trying to define and specify each one, recognizing their difference as well as their relationship and their joint indispensability to the result. A recent example is David Roediger, "'Labor in White Skin': Race and Working-Class History", in *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s*, ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker, Verso, London 1988, pp. 287–308. Roediger apparently believes that distinguishing analytically between *race* and *class* necessarily implies 'privileging' one over the other (to use his slang). And, in defending the identification of racism as a 'tragic flaw' that helps to explain American history, rather than as part of the history that needs explaining, he confuses a rhetorical device with a historical explanation.

<sup>13</sup> Alden T. Vaughan, 'The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97, July 1989, is a good example of the use as explanation of the very facts needing to be explained. The argument ends in explicit tautology: 'It may be more useful to see Anglo-American racism as a necessary precondition for a system of slavery based on ancestry and pigmentation.' That is, Anglo-American racism is a necessary precondition for Anglo-American racism. The argument ends as well in unseemly agnosticism about the possibility of rational explanation: '[R]acism was one cause of a particular type of slavery, though it may be better to avoid the term *cause*, for causation is itself a shaky concept in complex situations.' The quoted sentences appear on p. 353.

Only if *race* is defined as innate and natural prejudice of colour does its invocation as a historical explanation do more than repeat the question by way of answer. And there an insurmountable problem arises: since race is not genetically programmed, racial prejudice cannot be genetically programmed either but, like race itself, must arise historically. The most sophisticated of those who invoke race as a historical explanation—for example, George Fredrickson and Winthrop Jordan—recognize the difficulty. The preferred solution is to suppose that, having arisen historically, race then ceases to be a historical phenomenon and becomes instead an external motor of history; according to the fatuous but widely repeated formula, it 'takes on a life of its own'.<sup>4</sup> In other words, once historically acquired, race becomes hereditary. The shopworn metaphor thus offers camouflage for a latter-day version of Lamarckism.

### The History of an Ideology

Race is not an element of human biology (like breathing oxygen or reproducing sexually); nor is it even an idea (like the speed of light or the value of  $\pi$ ) that can be plausibly imagined to live an eternal life of its own. Race is not an idea but an ideology. It came into existence at a discernible historical moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reasons. The revolutionary bicentennials that Americans have celebrated with such unction—of independence in 1976 and of the Constitution in 1989—can as well serve as the bicentennial of racial ideology, since the birthdays are not far apart. During the revolutionary era, people who favoured slavery and people who opposed it collaborated in identifying the racial incapacity of Afro-Americans as the explanation for enslavement.<sup>5</sup> American racial ideology is as original an invention of the Founders as is the United States itself. Those holding liberty to be inalienable and holding Afro-Americans as slaves were bound to end by holding race to be a self-evident truth. Thus we ought to begin by restoring to race—that is, the American version of race—its proper history.

As convenient a place as any to begin a brief summary of that history, along with that of plantation society in British North America, is in seventeenth-century Virginia. Virginia founded during its early years and survived only through the good will and, when the colonists had exhausted that, the extorted tribute of the indigenous Indians. But during the second decade of the seventeenth century, Virginia discovered its vocation: the growing of tobacco. The first boom in what

---

<sup>4</sup> George Fredrickson has attempted to retread the old tyre once again in 'Race, Class and Consciousness', the introduction to his collection *The Arrangement of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality*, Middletown, Conn. 1988. See also Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1968.

<sup>5</sup> In elegant fashion, David Brion Davis has located the moment when racial ideology came into its own in the United States precisely in the era of the American Revolution, and has had the courage to admit that anti-slavery publicists and agitators were complicit with their pro-slavery counterparts in establishing race as the frame of the discussion. See *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1975, esp. chs. 4, 6, and 7.

would eventually become the United States took place during the 1620s, and it rested primarily on the backs of English indentured servants, not African slaves. Not until late in the century, after the boom had passed, did landowners begin buying slaves in large numbers, first from the West Indies and, after 1680, from Africa itself.<sup>16</sup> During the high years of the boom it was the 'free-born' Englishman who became, as one historian put it, 'a machine to make tobacco for somebody else'.<sup>17</sup>

Indentured servants served longer terms in Virginia than their English counterparts and enjoyed less dignity and less protection in law and custom. They could be bought and sold like livestock, kidnapped, stolen, put up as stakes in card games, and awarded—even before their arrival in America—to the victors in lawsuits. Greedy magnates (if the term is not redundant) stinted the servants' food and cheated them out of their freedom dues, and often out of their freedom itself, when they had served their time. Servants were beaten, maimed, and even killed with impunity. For expressing opinions unfavourable to the governor and the governing council, one man had both his arms broken and his tongue bored through with an awl, while another lost his ear and had to submit to a second seven-year term of servitude—to a member of the council that had judged his case.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever truths may have appeared self-evident in those days, neither an inalienable right to life and liberty nor the founding of government on the consent of the governed was among them. Virginia was a profit-seeking venture, and no one stood to make a profit growing tobacco by democratic methods. Only those who could force large numbers of people to work tobacco for them stood to get rich during the tobacco boom. Neither white skin nor English nationality protected servants from the grossest forms of brutality and exploitation. The only degradation they were spared was perpetual enslavement along with their issue in perpetuity, the fate that eventually befell the descendants of Africans.

Scholars occasionally maintain that English indentured servants escaped that fate while Africans fell victim to it because Europeans would go only so far and no farther in oppressing people of their own colour. But they really only believe such folklore when they are floating in the twilight world of racial ideology, a world in which even the Supreme Court of the United States finds itself mentally disarmed. Once restored to honest daylight, they know better. They know that the Greeks and Romans enslaved people of their own colour. They know that Europeans held other Europeans in both slavery and serfdom, and that the law in Tudor England provided for the enslavement of vagabonds. They know that the English considered no brutality too extreme in bringing to heel the supposedly savage and undoubtedly

<sup>16</sup> Edmund S. Morgan estimates that Virginia's black population numbered fewer than 500 in 1645 and fewer than 2,000 in 1660. *American Slavery, American Freedom. The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, New York 1975, p. 298.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–30.

fair-skinned Irish. Oliver Cromwell sold survivors of the Drogheda Massacre as slaves in Barbados, and his agents systematically auctioned Irish children off to planters in the West Indies. Nazi concentration camps swallowed up not only Jews and Gypsies but also partisans, resistance fighters, and Communists, whom even the United States Supreme Court would be hard-pressed to define as racial groups. From Peterloo to Santiago, Chile, to Kwangju, South Korea, to Tiananmen Square and the *barrios* of San Salvador, humanity has learned again and again that shared colour and nationality set no automatic limit to oppression. Ultimately, the only check upon oppression is the strength and effectiveness of resistance to it.

*Resistance* does not refer only to the fight that individuals, or collections of them, put up at any given time against those trying to impose on them. It refers also to the historical outcome of the struggle that has gone before, perhaps long enough before to have been hallowed by custom or formalized in law—as 'the rights of an Englishman', for example. The freedoms of lower-class Englishmen, and the somewhat lesser freedoms of lower-class Englishwomen, were not gifts of the English nobility, tendered out of solicitude for people of their own colour or nationality. Rather, they emerged from centuries of day-to-day contest, overt and covert, armed and unarmed, peaceable and forcible, over where the limits lay. Moral scruples about what could and what could not be done to the lower classes were nothing but the *shoulds* and *should nots* distilled from this collective historical experience, ritualized as rules of behaviour or systematized as common law—but always liable to be put once again on the table for negotiation or into the ring for combat.<sup>29</sup> Each new increment of freedom that the lower classes regarded as their due represented the provisional outcome of the last round in a continuing boxing-match and established the fighting weights of the contenders in the next round.

### Custom and Law

In the round that took place in early colonial Virginia, servants lost many of the concessions to their dignity, well-being and comfort that their counterparts had won in England. But not all. To have degraded the servants into slaves *en masse* would have driven the continuing struggle up several notches, a dangerous undertaking considering that servants were well-armed, that they outnumbered their masters, and that the Indians could easily take advantage of the inevitably resulting warfare among the enemy. Moreover, the enslavement of already arrived immigrants, once news of it reached England, would have threatened the sources of future immigration. Even the greediest and most short-sighted profiteer could foresee disaster in any such policy. Given how fast people died in Virginia, the lifetime's labour of most slaves would probably have amounted to less than a seven-year term

---

<sup>29</sup> For illustration, see Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasants' Movements and the English Rising of 1381*, London 1977; Thomas A. Green, *Verdict According to Conscience. Perspectives on the English Criminal Trial Jury, 1200-1800*, Chicago 1985; and C.S.L. Davies, 'Slavery and Protector Somerset. The Vagrancy Act of 1547', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 19 December 1966.

of servitude (fifteen thousand immigrants between 1625 and 1640 only increased the population from some thirteen hundred to seven or eight thousand).<sup>20</sup> And the prospect of gaining enslavable children in the future—an uncertain prospect, considering how few women arrived during the boom years<sup>21</sup>—could not compensate for the certain loss of adult immigrants in the present.

Some of these same considerations argued against employing African-descended slaves for life on a large scale; others did not. Needless to say, adverse publicity did not threaten the sources of forced migration as it did those of voluntary migration. Much more important: Africans and Afro-West Indians had not taken part in the long history of negotiation and contest in which the English lower classes had worked out the relationship between themselves and their superiors. Therefore, the custom and law that embodied that history did not apply to them. To put it another way: when English servants entered the ring in Virginia, they did not enter alone. Instead, they entered in company with the generations who had preceded them in the struggle; and the outcome of those earlier struggles established the terms and conditions of the latest one. But Africans and Afro-West Indians did enter the ring alone. Their forebears had struggled in a different arena, which had no bearing on this one. Whatever concessions they might obtain had to be won from scratch, in unequal combat, an ocean away from the people they might have called on for reinforcements.

Africans and Afro-West Indians were thus available for perpetual slavery in a way that English servants were not. Indeed, Virginians could purchase them ready-enslaved and pre-seasoned; and so they did in the earliest years of the traffic. Only much later did this become a matter of what we now call race. It took time, indeed, to become systematized as slavery. Although African or African-descended slaves dribbled in from 1619 on, the law did not formally recognize the condition of perpetual slavery or systematically mark out servants of African descent for special treatment until 1661. Indeed, African slaves during the years between 1619 and 1661 enjoyed rights that, in the nineteenth century, not even free black people could claim.<sup>22</sup> Simple practicality decided the matter. Until slavery became systematic, there was no need for a systematic slave code. And slavery could not become systematic so long as an African slave for life cost twice as much as an English servant for a five-year term, and stood a better-than-even chance of dying before five years could elapse.<sup>23</sup>

Not until the 1660s did that morbid arithmetic change; and by then other things had changed as well. The price of tobacco had fallen, and so had the numbers of English servants emigrating to America. Afro-Americans began living long enough to be worth enslaving for life, and Euro-Americans began living long enough to claim both the

---

<sup>20</sup> Morgan, p. 159

<sup>21</sup> Men outnumbered women more than five to one in 1624. Morgan, p. III.

<sup>22</sup> Willie Lee Rose, ed., *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America*, New York 1976, pp. 16–18; Morgan, pp. 154–57

<sup>23</sup> Morgan, pp. 197–98

freedom and the freedom dues—including land—to which they were entitled at the end of their terms of servitude. This last provoked countermeasures by those whose fortunes depended on the labour of servants. One such countermeasure was to concoct excuses for extending servants' terms, and that the Virginia Assembly set about with a vengeance during the 1650s, '60s and '70s. Another was to engross all the available land in the tidewater, forcing freed servants either to rent from the landowners (and thus continue working for the landowners' enrichment) or to settle in frontier regions, remote from water transportation and exposed to reprisals by Indians, who understandably resented this new encroachment by the aliens who had already driven them from the tidewater. By the 1670s, the rulers of Virginia faced a potentially serious problem: a large class of young (white) freedmen, landless, single, discontented—and well armed.<sup>24</sup>

Sure enough, trouble arrived on cue. In 1676, a group of just such young freedmen, joined by servants and slaves as well, launched the largest popular rebellion of colonial America, plundering the property of the well-to-do, burning the capital, and sending the royal governor and his cronies temporarily into hiding on Virginia's Eastern Shore. The rebellion ended abruptly, without accomplishing—or for that matter attempting or proposing—changes in the prevailing system of power and authority. What it did succeed in doing was planting suspicion and fear of the growing white lower class in the minds of the rich and powerful.<sup>25</sup>

It was a fortunate circumstance—fortunate for some, anyway—that made Africans and Afro-West Indians available for plantation labour at the historical moment when it became practical to buy slaves for life, and at the same time difficult and dangerous to continue using Europeans as the main source of plantation labour. The importation of African slaves in larger and larger numbers made it possible to maintain a sufficient corps of plantation labourers without building up an explosive charge of armed Englishmen resentful at being denied the rights of Englishmen and disposing of the material and political resources to make their resentment felt.<sup>26</sup>

Eventually, European settlement pushed into the interior, and freedmen—declining in numbers anyway as the immigration of servants slowed down—found it possible to take up land of their own. As the labour of slaves for life replaced that of servants for a term, the problem of providing for freedmen receded into the past. (So far into the past, indeed, that when providing for freedmen appeared once again on the nation's agenda, during the Civil War era, the ancient precedent of freedom dues had been all but forgotten. When Abraham

<sup>24</sup> Morgan, pp. 297, 215–49, 404; Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves. The Development of Southern Culture in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800*, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1986, ch. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Morgan, pp. 250–70.

<sup>26</sup> Slaves imported into Virginia came first from the West Indies and then, beginning in the 1680s, increasingly from Africa. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, three-quarters of black people in Virginia were of African origin. Ira Berlin, 'Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America', *American Historical Review* 85, February 1980, p. 71.

Lincoln and his contemporaries spoke of compensated emancipation, they did not feel a need to specify compensation for whom. No one talked of freedom dues, only of the folly of offering Negroes an unearned 'gift'.)

### From Oppression to Inferiority

Race as a coherent ideology did not spring into being simultaneously with slavery, but took even more time than slavery did to become systematic. A commonplace that few stop to examine holds that people are more readily oppressed when they are already perceived as inferior by nature. The reverse is more to the point. People are more readily perceived as inferior by nature when they are already seen as oppressed. Africans and their descendants might be, to the eye of the English, heathen in religion, outlandish in nationality, and weird in appearance. But that did not add up to an ideology of racial inferiority until a further historical ingredient got stirred into the mixture: the incorporation of Africans and their descendants into a polity and society in which they lacked rights that others not only took for granted, but claimed as a matter of self-evident natural law.<sup>27</sup>

All human societies, whether tacitly or overtly, assume that nature has ordained their social arrangements. Or, to put it another way, part of what human beings understand by the word 'nature' is the sense of inevitability that gradually becomes attached to a predictable, repetitive social routine: 'custom, so immemorial that it looks like nature', as Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote. The feudal nobility of the early Middle Ages consisted of people more powerful than their fellows through possession of arms or property or both. No one at that time, not even they themselves, considered them superior by blood or birth; indeed, that would have been heresy. But the nobleman's habit of commanding others, ingrained in day-to-day routine and thus bequeathed to heirs and descendants, eventually bred a conviction that the nobility was superior by nature, and ruled by right over innately inferior beings. By the end of the fifteenth century, what would have been heresy to an earlier age had become practically an article of faith.<sup>28</sup> The peasants did not fall under the dominion of the nobility by virtue of being perceived as innately inferior. On the contrary, they came to be perceived as innately inferior by virtue of having fallen under the nobility's dominion.

Facts of nature spawned by the needs of ideology sometimes acquire greater power over people's minds than facts of nature spawned by nature itself. Some noblemen in tsarist Russia sincerely believed that, while their bones were white, the serfs' bones were black;<sup>29</sup> and, given the violence that prevailed in those times, I must presume that noblemen had ample occasion to observe the serfs' bones at first hand. Such is the weight of things that must be true ideologically that no amount of experimental observation can disprove them. But because tsarist Russia had no conception of absolute equality resting

---

<sup>27</sup> See Fields, 'Ideology and Race in American History', pp. 143-77.

<sup>28</sup> Jerome Blum, *Our Forgotten Past: Seven Centuries of Life on the Land*, London 1982, pp. 34-36.

<sup>29</sup> Kolchin, *Unfree Labor*, p. 170.



on natural law, it did not need as consistent or radical a version of absolute inequality resting on natural law as developed in the United States in the wake of the Revolution.<sup>30</sup> When self-evident laws of nature guarantee freedom, only equally self-evident laws of equally self-evident nature can account for its denial.

Historians can actually observe colonial Americans in the act of preparing the ground for race without foreknowledge of what would later rise on the foundation they were laying. A law enacted in the colony of Maryland in 1664 established the legal status of slave for life and experimented with assigning slave condition after the condition of the father. That experiment was soon dropped. Paternity is always ambiguous, whereas maternity is not. Slaveholders eventually recognized the advantage of a different and unambiguous rule of descent, one that would guarantee to owners all offspring of slave women, however fathered, at the slight disadvantage of losing to them such offspring as might have been fathered on free women by slave men. Nevertheless, the purpose of the experiment is clear: to prevent the erosion of slaveowners' property rights that would result if the offspring of free white women impregnated by slave men were entitled to freedom. The language of the preamble to the law makes clear that the point was not yet race: 'And forasmuch as divers freeborne English women forgettfull of their free Condicon and to the disgrace of our Nation doe intermarry with Negro slaues by which alsoe diuers suites may arise touching the Issue of such woemen and a great damage doth befall the Masters of such Negroes . . .'<sup>31</sup>

'Freeborne English women'—not white women—were forgetting their free condition and disgracing their nation—not yet forgetting their colour and disgracing their race. And from their forgetting and disgracing arose 'diuers suites' and 'a great damage' to the slaveowners. *Race* does not explain that law. Rather, the law shows society in the act of inventing race.<sup>32</sup> Practical needs—the need to clarify the

---

<sup>30</sup> In explaining why slaveholders in the American South developed a more thorough and elaborate pro-slavery ideology than Russian lords of serfs, Kolchin comes to the brink of this conclusion, only to back away from it into tautology. He argues that the presence of a 'racial' distinction between owner and slave that did not exist between lord and serf 'partly' accounts for the difference. But, as he quickly concedes, owners of African-descended slaves elsewhere in the Americas did not develop a thorough or consistent pro-slavery argument either. The racial distinction did not 'exist' in either the American South or Russia, but was invented in one and not the other. The 'racial' distinction between Southern owners and their slaves does not explain anything, but is itself part of what needs to be explained.

<sup>31</sup> 'An Act Concerning Negroes & other Slaues', in Willie Lee Rose, ed., *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America*, New York 1976, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> A law enacted in colonial Virginia illustrates the pitfall of anachronism awaiting historians who handle such material ahistorically. An entry under 'Negroes' in the index to a compilation of Virginia's laws refers readers to a provision against Negroes 'Lifting hand against a white man', and that is how Ira Berlin characterizes the law. (*Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South*, New York 1974, p. 8.) But the index was prepared for a compilation published in 1823. The law itself, enacted in 1680, provides a penalty for 'any negroe or other slave [who] shall presume to lift up his hand in opposition against any christian.' William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, From the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, vol. 2, New York 1823, pp. 481, 602.

property rights of slaveholders and the need to discourage free people from fraternizing with slaves—called forth the law. And once practical needs of this sort are ritualized often enough either as conforming behaviour or as punishment for non-conforming behaviour, they acquire an ideological rationale that explains to those who take part in the ritual why it is both automatic and natural to do so.

During the heyday of the cotton empire in the nineteenth century, slavery continued to perform the service it had pioneered in colonial times: that of limiting the need for free citizens (which is to say white people) to exploit each other directly and thereby identifying class exploitation with racial exploitation. But it also did much more than that. The domination of plantation slavery over Southern society preserved the social space within which the white yeomanry—that is, the small farmers and artisans who accounted for about three-fourths of the white families in the slave South just before the Civil War—could enjoy economic independence and a large measure of local self-determination, insulated from the realm of capitalist market society. By doing so, slavery permitted and required the white majority to develop its own characteristic form of racial ideology.

### The White Yeomanry

Two-thirds of the people of the Old South were free and white. Of these, most owned no slaves and the few who did used them mainly for hunting, fishing, general farming and household chores, not for growing cash crops like cotton and tobacco. They tended to live in the backcountry, in areas too hilly, rocky, sandy, infertile, chilly, or far from navigable water to be of interest to planters. In fact, many had seen their parents or grandparents driven from better land as the slave plantations expanded to the west.<sup>33</sup> For reasons of their own self-interest, slaveholding planters did not wish either to antagonize non-slaveholders in their backcountry sanctuaries (since the yeomen outnumbered and thus potentially outvoted them) or to interfere in their local communities. Schools, roads, railroads and other improvements in the backcountry would require the planters to tax themselves—something they did as little as possible. For their part, the yeomen were jealous of their local independence and self-determination. They did not want the state telling them to send their children to school, and many mistrusted railroads, with their land speculators and pirates and their locomotives that might set fields ablaze or run over children and livestock.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Ulrich B. Phillips, 'The Origin and Growth of the Southern Black Belts', in Phillips, *The Slave Economy of the Old South: Selected Essays in Economic and Social History*, ed. Eugene D. Genovese, Baton Rouge, La. 1968.

<sup>34</sup> My discussion of the white non-slaveholders rests largely on the important work of Steven Hahn, including *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, New York 1983, esp. part I; 'Common Right and Commonwealth: The Stock-Law Struggle and the Roots of Southern Populism', in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, New York 1982; and 'Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging: Common Rights and Class Relations in the Postbellum South', *Radical History Review* 26, 1982. Also see Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, eds.,

Within their local communities, the white non-slaveholders developed a way of life as different from that of the slaveowning planters as from that of farmers in those Northern states where capitalist agriculture already prevailed. They grew only enough cash crops (that is, cotton or tobacco, because rice and sugar were chiefly plantation crops) for home use or to pay for those few purchases that required cash. For the rest, they concentrated on food crops—grain, potatoes, vegetables—and livestock. A custom long defunct in the Northern states permitted anyone to graze livestock or to hunt and fish on any land, public or private, that was not fenced. Thus, even people who owned little or no land could still keep livestock. The non-slaveholders traded in local markets, not national and international ones, and usually on the basis of barter or 'swap-work'. ('Swap-work' meant that someone might, for example, repair the roof of his neighbour's barn, in exchange for the neighbour's putting a new wheel on his wagon or making him a pair of boots.) Local stores sold mainly commodities that the community could not produce—for example, firearms and ammunition, molasses, and nails—since the community was largely self-sufficient in food, furniture, shoes and clothing. Nearly every household owned a spinning-wheel, with which home-grown cotton could be turned into yarn for making the family's clothes. A network of indebtedness held the community together, at the same time that it started arguments and lawsuits: everybody owed something to somebody else. The local store did not even charge interest until a debt was over a year old. The law itself recognized the rules of basic justice that prevailed within the non-slaveholders' communities. Most states of the lower South had a law known as the 'homestead exemption'. Even if the head of a household went bankrupt, his creditors could not strip him of his house and its furnishings and land—enough to permit him to retain his social and economic independence.

Strong belief in the value of social independence led the non-slaveholders to share with planters a contempt for both the hiring labourers of the North and the chattel slaves of the South; it also bred in them an egalitarian instinct that never gracefully accepted any white man's aristocratic right to rule other white men—a right the planters never doubted with regard to the lower classes of whatever colour. The racial ideology of the yeomanry therefore could not possibly replicate that of the planters. Instead, it emerged as a byproduct of the practical, day-to-day business of the yeomen's lives.

This is perhaps a good moment to say a few words about what ideology is and what it is not; because without an understanding of what

---

34. (cont.)

*Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies*, Westport, Conn. 1981, and Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia*, Baton Rouge, La. 1977. J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860*, Baton Rouge, La. 1978, and Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860*, New York 1988, offer interpretations of the white yeomanry differing from Hahn's, but much of their evidence tends rather to sustain it.

ideology is and does, how it arises and how it is sustained, there can be no genuinely historical understanding of race. Ideology is best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day. It is the language of consciousness that suits the particular way in which people deal with their fellows. It is the interpretation in thought of the social relations through which they constantly create and re-create their collective being, in all the varied forms their collective being may assume: family, clan, tribe, nation, class, party, business enterprise, church, army, club, and so on. As such, ideologies are not delusions but real, as real as the social relations for which they stand.

Ideologies are real, but it does not follow that they are scientifically accurate, or that they provide an analysis of social relations that would make sense to anyone who does not take ritual part in those social relations. Some societies (including colonial New England) have explained troublesome relations between people as witchcraft and possession by the devil. The explanation makes sense to those whose daily lives produce and reproduce witchcraft, nor can any amount of rational 'evidence' disprove it. Witchcraft in such a society is as self-evident a natural fact as race is to Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post*. To someone looking in from outside, however, explaining a miscarriage, a crop failure, a sudden illness, or a death by invoking witchcraft would seem absurd, just as explaining slavery by invoking race must seem absurd to anyone who does not ritually produce race day in and day out as Americans do. Ideologies do not need to be plausible, let alone persuasive, to outsiders. They do their job when they help insiders make sense of the things they do and see—ritually, repetitively—on a daily basis.

So much ideology is. Here is what it is not. It is not a material entity, a thing of any sort, that you can hand down like an old garment, pass on like a germ, spread like a rumour, or impose like a code of dress or etiquette. Nor is it a collection of disassociated beliefs—'attitudes' is the favoured jargon among American social scientists and the historians they have mesmerized—that you can extract from their context and measure by current or retrospective survey research. (Someday the reification of conduct and demeanour in 'attitudes' will seem as quaint and archaic as their reification in bodily 'humours'—phlegmatic, choleric, melancholic, sanguine—does now.) Nor is it a Frankenstein's monster that takes on a life of its own.

Ideology is not the same as *propaganda*. Someone who said, 'Anti-slavery *ideology* infiltrated the slave quarters through illicit abolitionist newspapers', would be talking rather about propaganda than about ideology. The slaves' anti-slavery ideology could not be smuggled to them in alien newsprint. People deduce and verify their ideology in daily life. The slaves' anti-slavery ideology had to arise from their lives in slavery and from their daily relations with slaveholders and other

members of slave society.<sup>35</sup> Frederick Douglass was not propounding a paradox but speaking the simple truth when he said that the first anti-slavery lecture he ever heard was delivered by his master in the course of explaining to his mistress why slaves must not be taught to read. By the same token, slaves who decided at the first shot of the Civil War—or even earlier, with Lincoln's election—that emancipation was finally on the nation's agenda were not responding to prevailing Northern propaganda (which, indeed, promised nothing of the kind at that time). It was their experience with slaveowners, not least the slaveowners' hysterical equation of the Republican Party with abolition, that made slaves see Lincoln as the emancipator before he saw himself that way. And, I might add, it was the slaves' acting on that foreknowledge that forced Lincoln to become the emancipator.

### Ideology, Propaganda and Dogma

To insist that ideology and propaganda are not the same is not to suppose that they are unrelated. The most successful propagandist is one who thoroughly understands the ideology of those to be propagandized. When propagandists for secession before the American Civil War emphasized the danger that the Northerners might encroach upon Southerners' right of self-determination, they emphasized a theme that resonated as well with the world of non-slaveholders as with that of planters, even though the two worlds differed as night from day. 'We will never be slaves' was good secessionist propaganda. 'We must never let them take our slaves' would have been poor propaganda and the secessionists knew it; just as today 'Strategic Defence Initiative' makes a good advertisement for a weapons programme, whereas 'Strategic Offensive Initiative' or 'First-Strike Initiative' would not.

Neither is ideology the same as *doctrine* or *dogma*: Pro-slavery *doctrine* might well hold, for example, that any white person's word must take precedence over any black person's. But the push-and-shove reality of any planter's business would tell him or her that some situations call for accepting a slave's word over an overseer's.<sup>36</sup> After all, overseers came and went, but slaves remained; and the object was to produce cotton or sugar or rice or tobacco, not to produce white supremacy. The perfect subordination of the slaves to the overseer, if coupled with poor production, would spell disaster for a planter. Thus, the ideology of a planter—that is, the vocabulary of day-to-day action and experience—must make room for contest and struggle (perhaps

---

<sup>35</sup> The slaves' religion arose in the same way. In an astute and eloquent passage, Donald G. Mathews diagnoses the error of supposing that the slaves should or could have had a 'correct' version of Christianity transmitted to them by an outside agency. To argue that way, Mathews correctly insists, presupposes that the slave could 'alough off his enslavement, ancestry, traditional ways of viewing the world, and sense of selfhood in order to think the oppressor's thoughts after him. . . . The description of action in which the slave is expected to remain passive while receiving a discrete body of ideas and attitudes which exist apart from social and cultural conditions reveals one of the most mischievous and flawed assumptions which scholars make.' *Religion in the Old South*, Chicago 1967, p. 187.

<sup>36</sup> Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, New York 1974, p. 16

couched in paternalistic or racist language), even if doctrine specified an eternal hierarchy. Doctrine or dogma may be imposed, and they often are: dissenters can be excommunicated from a church or expelled from a party. But ideology is a distillate of experience. Where the experience is lacking, so is the ideology that only the missing experience could call into being. Planters in the Old South could have imposed their understanding of the world upon the non-slaveholders or the slaves only if they could have transformed the lives of the non-slaveholders and slaves into a replica of their own.

An ideology must be constantly created and verified in social life; if it is not, it dies, even though it may seem to be safely embodied in a form that can be handed down.<sup>37</sup> Many Christians still think of kneeling with folded hands as the appropriate posture for prayer, but few now know why; and the few who do know cannot, even if they choose, mean the same thing by it as was meant by those to whom the posture was part of an ideology still real in everyday social life. The social relations that once gave explicit meaning to that ritual gesture of the vassal's subordination to his lord are now as dead as a mackerel, and so, therefore, is the ideological vocabulary—including the posture of prayer—in which those social relations once lived.

The foregoing line of argument raises the question of how one group's understanding of reality, its ideology, appears to prevail over others when it comes to real and effective political power. Depending on who poses the question, it is the problem of social order, of converting power into authority, or of political hegemony. The most obvious answer—force—is not an answer. There is never ultimately enough force to go around, particularly since submission is hardly ever an end in itself. If the slaveholders had produced white supremacy without producing cotton, their class would have perished in short order. A colonial ruler does not just want the natives to bow down and render obeisance to their new sovereign. The natives must also grow food, pay taxes, go to work in mines and on estates, provide conscripts for the army, and help to hold the line against rival powers. For these activities to proceed, the natives must not just submit, they must cooperate. Even in those few cases in which submission is an end in itself, force is never enough in itself. Slaveholders, colonial rulers, prison guards and the Shah's police have all had occasion to discover that when nothing remains except force, nothing remains—period. The rule of any group, the power of any state, rests on force in the final analysis. Anyone who gives the least thought to the matter reaches that conclusion, and thinkers as different in other respects as Weber, Marx, Machiavelli and Madison would have no trouble agreeing on that. Rule always rests on force in the last analysis. But a ruling group or a state that must rely on force in the first analysis as well is one living in a state of siege, rebellion, war or revolution.

It will not do to suppose that a powerful group captures the hearts and minds of the less powerful, inducing them to 'internalize' the

---

<sup>37</sup> Some people imagine that ideology can indeed be handed down in the form of law. If that were so, then the law could do without courts, lawyers, judges, and juries.

ruling ideology (to borrow the spurious adjective-verb in which this artless evasion has so often been couched). To suppose that is to imagine ideology handed down like an old garment, passed on like a germ, spread like a rumour, or imposed like a dress code. Any of these would presuppose that an experience of social relations can be transmitted by the same means, which is impossible.

And yet, power does somehow become authority. A red light, or the upraised palm of a traffic policeman, brings people to a stop (at least in places where people tend to obey them) not by the exercise of power—neither a light nor a hand can stop a moving automobile—but by the exercise of authority. Why? Not, surely, because everyone shares a belief, an 'attitude', about the sanctity of the law, or holds the same conception of a citizen's duty. Many citizens who would unhesitatingly stop for a red light, even at a deserted intersection at 2:00 a.m., would painstakingly calculate the relative cost and benefit of breaking laws against environmental pollution, insider-trading in securities, or failing to report income to the Internal Revenue Service, and then obey or violate the law according to how the calculation worked out.

It is not an abstract belief or attitude that brings people to stop at a red light. Rather, people discover the advantage of being able to take for granted what everyone else will do at a busy intersection. Or, to be more exact, they have grown up in a society that constantly ritualizes that discovery—by making people stop again and again for red lights—without each person having to make the discovery anew by ad hoc calculation at every intersection. Both parts are necessary: the demonstrable advantage of stopping and the constant re-enactment of the appropriate conduct, a re-enactment that removes the matter from the realm of calculation to that of routine. The ritual repetition of the appropriate social behaviour makes for the continuity of ideology, not the 'handing down' of the appropriate 'attitudes'. There, too, lies the key to why people may suddenly appear to slough off an ideology to which they had appeared subservient. Ideology is not a set of attitudes that people can 'have' as they have a cold, and throw off the same way. Human beings live in human societies by negotiating a certain social terrain, whose map they keep alive in their minds by the collective, ritual repetition of the activities they must carry out in order to negotiate the terrain. If the terrain changes, so must their activities, and therefore so must the map.

### Shaping the Terrain

Let me pursue a bit further this analogy of terrain. But imagine a physical landscape: trees here, a river there, mountains, valleys, quicksand, desert and so on. And imagine an observer at the altitude of an earth satellite, who for some reason can follow the paths of people over the terrain, but cannot see the details of the landscape. The observer sees people tunneling under, climbing over, jogging to left or right, moving with odd swimming motions, even disappearing unceremoniously into the quicksand. Given a modicum of training in the orthodox tradition of American history, he might conclude that people in this part of the landscape have 'attitudes' calling for one

kind of movement, while people in that part have 'attitudes' calling for another kind—all of these 'attitudes' possessing a 'life of their own'. Given a modicum of wisdom, he would realize that the key to understanding the people's movements is to analyse the terrain.

Therein, also, lies the key to understanding how one group acquires authority, imposes order, or achieves hegemony. Exercising rule means being able to shape the terrain. Suppose that the ruling group wants everyone in our landscape to move east, and therefore starts fires in the forests to the west. Mission accomplished: everybody moves east. Because they all share a conviction—an 'attitude'—glorifying the virtues of easterly movement? Not necessarily. All that order, authority or hegemony requires is that the interest of the mass in not getting burned alive should intersect the interest of the rulers in moving everyone to the east. If easterly movement subsequently becomes part of the routine by which the masses organize their lives independently of the rulers so that such movement becomes part of a constantly repeated social routine, a vocabulary will soon enough explain to the masses—not analytically, but descriptively—what easterly movement means. And that vocabulary need not and cannot be a duplicate of the one spoken by the rulers.

Racial ideology supplied the means of explaining slavery to people whose terrain was a republic founded on radical doctrines of liberty and natural rights; and, more important, a republic in which those doctrines seemed to represent accurately the world in which all but a minority lived. Only when the denial of liberty became an anomaly apparent even to the least observant and reflective members of Euro-American society did ideology systematically explain the anomaly. But slavery got along for a hundred years after its establishment without race as its ideological rationale. The reason is simple. Race explained why some people could rightly be denied what others took for granted: namely, liberty, supposedly a self-evident gift of nature's God. But there was nothing to explain until most people could, in fact, take liberty for granted—as the indentured servants and disfranchised freedmen of colonial America could not. Nor was there anything calling for a radical explanation where everyone in society stood in a relation of inherited subordination to someone else: servant to master, serf to nobleman, vassal to overlord, overlord to king, king to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

It was not Afro-Americans, furthermore, who needed a racial explanation; it was not they who invented themselves as a race. Euro-Americans resolved the contradiction between slavery and liberty by defining Afro-Americans as a race; Afro-Americans resolved the contradiction more straightforwardly by calling for the abolition of slavery. From the era of the American, French and Haitian revolutions on, they claimed liberty as theirs by natural right.<sup>38</sup> They did not

---

<sup>38</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*, Baton Rouge, La. 1979; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 2nd ed., rev., New York 1963; Willie Lee Rose, 'The Impact of the American Revolution on the Black Population', in Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, ed. William W. Freehling, New York 1982.



originate the large nineteenth-century literature purporting to prove their biological inferiority, nor, by and large, did they accept it. Vocabulary can be very deceptive. Both Afro- and Euro-Americans used the words that today denote race, but they did not understand those words the same way. Afro-Americans understood the reason for their enslavement to be, as Frederick Douglass put it, 'not *color*, but *crime*'.<sup>39</sup> Afro-Americans invented themselves, not as a race, but as a nation. They were not troubled, as modern scholars often are, by the use of racial vocabulary to express their sense of nationality. Afro-American soldiers who petitioned on behalf of 'These poor nation of colour' and 'we Poore Nation of a Colored rast [race]' saw nothing incongruous about the language.<sup>40</sup>

Racial ideology in its radical American form is the ideology to be expected in a society in which enslavement stands as an exception to a radically defined liberty so commonplace that no great effort of imagination is required to take it for granted. It is the ideology proper to a 'free' society in which the enslaved descendants of Africans are an anomalous exception. There is no paradox; it makes good, common sense. Indeed, I dare go further. In the wake of the American Revolution, racial ideology assumed its greatest importance in the free, bourgeois society of the Northern states, where both slavery and the presence of Afro-Americans became increasingly minor exceptions.<sup>41</sup> The paroxysm of racial violence that convulsed the South during the years after emancipation, and the ever more detailed legal codification of racial proscription, represent the nationalization of race, an ideology that described the bourgeois North much better than it did the slave South.

For those living within the maturing slave society of the South, racial ideology in its radical American form could not fully account for the social landscape. There, slavery was not a minor exception but the central organizing principle of society, allocating social space not just to slaveholders and slaves but to the free black population<sup>42</sup> and the

<sup>39</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, New York 1969 (orig. ed. 1855), p. 90.

<sup>40</sup> Sargint Wm. White et al. to Dear President, 3 July 1866, document 333, and Capt. G.E. Stanford et al. to Mr. President and the Ceterry of War, 30 May 1866, document 341, in Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. 2, *The Black Military Experience*, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 764, 780.

<sup>41</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson is an excellent illustration of how such racial ideology could become chillingly systematic and loathsome racial doctrine in the hands of a first-rate Northern intellectual. Lewis P. Simpson perceptively and relentlessly probes Emerson's bigoted views about Afro-Americans (and, for that matter, his bigoted views about white Southerners) in *Mind and the American Civil War: A Meditation on Lost Causes*, Baton Rouge, La. 1989, esp. pp. 52-57, 65-69, 72-73.

<sup>42</sup> During the 1850s, the state of Georgia levied a property tax of \$0.39 on each slave but a poll tax of \$5.00 on each free black person. (For white people, the poll tax was \$0.25 and applied to men only.) Annual road duty was required of slavesmen and white men aged sixteen to forty-five, but of free black men and women aged fifteen to sixty. (Peter Wallenstein, *From Slave to New South: Public Policy in Nineteenth-Century Georgia*, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1987, pp. 41, 93.) In July 1881, a white citizen of Lynchburg, Virginia, complained to Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, about the 'large number of Free Negroes in this City,' branding them at once a 'degraded and worse than useless race' and a 'class who . . . is more than useless'. (John Lensham to

non-slaveholding white majority as well. Inequality was not a necessary evil to be tolerated only in the instance of uncivilized Negroes, nor was its necessity commonly derived from biological science. (In the South, the heyday of scientific racism—as of scientific sexism—came after, not during, slavery.)<sup>43</sup> Inequality was ordained by God, not by science, and was applicable not only to relations between slaveholders and slaves, but also to relations between men and women and between the planter elite and the non-slaveholding majority. Democracy and majority rule did not rank high in the aspirations of the planter class.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the organic intellectuals of the planter class (who rivalled Engels in well-aimed propaganda denouncing the suffering of workers under industrial capitalism) regretted that the white labouring poor of their own society could not be brought under the benevolent regime of slavery—called by tactful euphemisms like 'warranteeism without the ethnical qualification' and 'slavery in the abstract'. It would not do, after all, to tell an armed and enfranchised white majority that they, too, would be better off as slaves.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> (cont.)

Hon. Jeff. Davis, 15 July 1861, document 299, in Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, *Proslavery: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*, series 1, volume 1, *The Destruction of Slavery*, Cambridge 1985, p. 760.) In the eyes of that Virginian and of state and county law in Georgia, slaves and free people of African descent were not the same 'race' and neither biology nor ancestry nor prejudice of colour had anything to do with it. By word and deed, white citizens in slave society proved that they, unlike many scholars, were not fooled by the language of race into mistaking its substance.

<sup>43</sup> Josiah C. Nott provoked a hostile reaction from other pro-slavery Southerners when he expounded a scientific theory of racism that seemed to contradict scripture. See Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860*, Baton Rouge, La. 1981, pp. 206–38; Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, pp. 69–72. On the nature of white Southerners' arguments for women's subordination during and after slavery, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'The Conservatism of Slaveholding Women: A Comparative Perspective', Porter L. Fortune Chancellor's Symposium on Southern History, University of Mississippi, 11–13 October 1989.

<sup>44</sup> For example, John C. Calhoun's doctrine of the 'concurrent majority' was explicitly designed to frustrate the will of an anti-slavery majority, should one ever gain control of the United States government, by guaranteeing the slaveholding minority a veto no matter how large the numerical majority arrayed against it. See Calhoun's 'A Disquisition on Government', ed. Richard K. Crallé, in *The Works of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 1, New York 1968. Many historians, following the lead of George Fredrickson, characterize the slave South as a 'herrenvolk democracy'. It is a specious concept that fails to take account of the ways in which slavery curtailed the political rights of the non-slaveholding white majority, the supposed *herrenvolk*. An obvious example is the overrepresentation of slaveholders secured by the three-fifths provision of the United States Constitution (replicated in the constitution of the Confederacy). Another example is the requirement for the posting of bond—ranging from \$1000 to \$500,000—that replaced property qualifications for county officers in the plantation districts, ensuring that humble citizens could hold office only under the patronage of their betters. See Steven Hahn, 'Capitalists All!', review of James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, in *Reviews in American History* 11, June 1983.

<sup>45</sup> Eugene D. Genovese developed this argument long ago in his essay about George Fitzhugh, 'The Logical Outcome of the Slaveholders' Philosophy', in Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation*, New York 1969. A number of historians at first dismissed the argument on the grounds that Fitzhugh was a one-of-a-kind aberration—a charge occasionally repeated even today; for example, George C. Rable, *Civil War: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism*, Urbana, Ill. 1989, p. 291n. Subsequent work has demonstrated that, although Fitzhugh was indeed one of a

## Race Today

The pro-slavery intellectuals' reticence in stating that conclusion publicly and forthrightly goes far to explain why the United States to this day has failed to develop a thorough, consistent and honest political conservatism. The only historical ground that might have nourished such a tradition—namely, the slave society of the South—was contaminated by the need to humour the democratic aspirations of a propertied, enfranchised, and armed white majority. Few self-styled conservative politicians in the United States today dare argue on principle (at least in public) that hereditary inequality and subordination should be the lot of the majority. Instead, those prepared to defend inequality do so on the basis of a bastard free-market liberalism, with racial, ethnic or sexual determinism tacked on as an inconsistent afterthought.

Meanwhile, many well-intentioned believers in truth and justice succumb to biological determinism, the armour of the enemy, when they see around them the ugly signs that racism continues to thrive in our world. Weary of the struggle, they throw up their hands and declare that racism, if not genetically programmed, is nonetheless an idea so old and entrenched that it has 'taken on a life of its own'. They thereby come much closer than they realize to the views of those they ostensibly oppose. Although it is now frowned upon to attribute biological disability to those designated to be a race, it is eminently fashionable to attribute biological disability—or its functional equivalent—to those demonstrated to be racists. Either way, Africans and their descendants become a special category set apart by biology: in the one instance their own, in the other that of their persecutors.

But race is neither biology nor an idea absorbed into biology by Lamarckian inheritance. It is ideology, and ideologies do not have lives of their own. Nor can they be handed down or inherited: a doctrine can be, or a name, or a piece of property, but not an ideology. If race lives on today, it does not live on because we have inherited it from our forebears of the seventeenth century or the eighteenth or nineteenth, but because we continue to create it today. David Brion Davis had the courage and honesty to argue the disturbing thesis that, during the era of the American Revolution, those who opposed slavery were complicit with those who favoured it in settling on race as its explanation. We must be courageous and honest enough to admit something similar about our own time and our own actions.

Those who create and re-create race today are not just the mob that killed a young Afro-American man on a street in Brooklyn or the

---

<sup>45</sup> (cont.)

kind in some respects, he was no aberration in considering slave society morally superior to capitalist society ('free trade' in his terminology) regardless of the slaves' nationality or descent. See Drew Gilpin Faust, 'The Peculiar South Revisited: White Society, Culture, and Politics in the Antebellum Period, 1800-1860', in *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Sanford W. Higginbotham*, ed. John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, Baton Rouge, La. 1987, esp. pp. 102-105; Simpson, *Mind and the American Civil War*, pp. 30-32.

people who join the Klan and the White Order. They are also those academic writers whose invocation of self-propelling 'attitudes' and tragic flaws assigns Africans and their descendants to a special category, placing them in a world exclusively theirs and outside history—a form of intellectual apartheid no less ugly or oppressive, despite its righteous (not to say self-righteous) trappings, than that practised by the bio- and theo-racists; and for which the victims, like slaves of old, are expected to be grateful. They are the academic 'liberals' and 'progressives' in whose version of race the neutral shibboleths *difference* and *diversity* replace words like *slavery*, *injustice*, *oppression* and *exploitation*, diverting attention from the anything-but-neutral history these words denote. They are also the Supreme Court and spokesmen for affirmative action, unable to promote or even define justice except by enhancing the authority and prestige of race; which they will continue to do forever so long as the most radical goal of the political opposition remains the reallocation of unemployment, poverty and injustice rather than their abolition.

The creators and re-creators of race include as well a young woman who chuckled appreciatively when her four-year-old boy, upon being asked whether a young friend whose exploit he was recounting was black, answered: 'No; he's brown.' The young woman's benevolent laughter was for the innocence of youth, too soon corrupted. But for all its benevolence, her laughter hastened the corruption whose inevitability she laments, for it taught the little boy that his empirical description was cute but inappropriate. It enacted for him, in a way that hand-me-down stereotypes never could, the truth that physical description follows race, not the other way around. Of just such small, innocuous and constantly repeated rituals, often undertaken with the best of motives, is race reborn every day. Evil may result as well from good as from ill intentions. That is the fallibility and tragedy of human history—or, to use a different vocabulary, its dialectic.

Nothing handed down from the past could keep race alive if we did not constantly reinvent and re-ritualize it to fit our own terrain. If race lives on today, it can do so only because we continue to create and re-create it in our social life, continue to verify it, and thus continue to need a social vocabulary that will allow us to make sense, not of what our ancestors did then, but of what we ourselves choose to do now.\*

© Barbara Jeanne Fields

---

\* The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments of David Brion Davis on an earlier version of this essay. She has benefited from discussions with Karen E. Fields, Leslie S. Rowland, Julie Seville, and Michael R. West, and from the spirited reaction of audiences who heard the paper in Brazil in the Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto in Mariana, the Universidade Federal de São Paulo, and the Universidade Federal Fluminense in Niterói; and in the United States at the University of California, San Diego; The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the University of Mississippi in Oxford, and Columbia University in New York City.

## Still a Question of Hegemony

The analysis in *NLR* 179 by Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett and Simon Bromley of Thatcherism's current difficulties in terms of the weaknesses of its economic strategy, demonstrates the power and indispenability of 'traditional' political economy.<sup>1</sup> But it also shows some of the limitations of that approach. They present their analysis as an antidote to what they see as the idealism of Stuart Hall's analysis of Thatcherism—both in his earlier treatment of it as 'authoritarian populism' and in his recent discussion of it in relation to 'New Times'.<sup>2</sup> However, if Hall's work attributes too much importance to ideology (as they believe), their own virtually ignores it, and this leads them to misrepresent the real nature of Thatcherism, and to understate the real weakness of Labour's current 'market-research socialism' as an alternative. They assume that the task confronting governments in Britain today is one of creating a national economy capable of supporting rising living standards for the masses. They do not recognize that this was impossible in 1979, and may still be impossible. They fault Thatcherism for not having an industrial strategy of a kind which the Conservatives could not have pursued even if they had wished to. Because they reject the centrality of ideology, they underestimate the Conservatives' accomplishment in securing at least national acquiescence in a new kind of national accommodation to the forces of the world market. It is true that the effects of this accommodation are likely to cost the Conservatives the next election, but neither Hall nor anyone else has ever maintained that Thatcherism had discovered the secret of permanent electoral success. What may well be permanent, however, is the Thatcherite 'settlement'—at least as permanent as that of the postwar 'Keynesian welfare state'.

### Thatcherism: A Failed Economic Project?

The political-economic analysis of the Thatcherite project outlined by

---

<sup>1</sup> Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett and Simon Bromley, 'Farewell to Thatcherism? Neo-Liberalism and "New Times"', *NLR* 179, January–February 1990, pp. 81–102. See also their book, with Tom Ling, *Thatcherism: A Tale of Two Nations*, Cambridge 1988.

<sup>2</sup> See Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, Verso, London 1988; and Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, London 1989.

Jessop and his colleagues is rich and, in general, very cogent; in fact it is just the sort of analysis which their earlier book promised, and it would be invaluable to have it developed.<sup>3</sup> One can agree without reservation that after the severe deflation of 1979–81, and assisted by North Sea oil and gas production, by privatization sales, and above all by Reagan's 'military Keynesianism', Thatcherism has rested, politically, on a consumption boom, involving an accelerated shift in the structure of the economy from manufacturing towards services. One can also agree unreservedly that the rise in inflation levels since 1986, and the reappearance of a very large current-account deficit in the balance of payments, leading to high interest rates and the risk of another round of deflation, is now hurting many of those whose disaffection from Labour made possible Mrs Thatcher's strong parliamentary majorities, in spite of her relatively limited electoral base. These conditions also threaten to resurrect the crisis atmosphere of the 1970s, exploited so effectively in her successful bid for power: an atmosphere apt to destroy even a government which declares that the market and not the government is responsible for our economic fate. One may even agree—though here with some reservations—that the continued weaknesses of manufacturing are partly attributable to the government's economic strategy; and that it is ultimately these weaknesses, rather than Mrs Thatcher's obnoxious 'style', or particular blunders such as the poll tax, that are undermining her government, just as they undermined those of Wilson, Heath and Callaghan. (That is, if manufacturing performance were now to reduce sharply the balance-of-payments deficit, so that inflation and interest rates fell, tax levels remained constant and real disposable income continued to rise, a Conservative defeat in 1991 could not be counted on.) The case for looking closely at the long-term impact of Thatcherism on the long-term structural problem of the economy is undeniable.

The reservations are, however, important. First, it is not yet clear that the manufacturing sector is 'just' as weak as it used to be. Second, it is not clear that the standpoint from which Jessop and his colleagues put forward their critique of Thatcherism—as a failed economic project, rather than a successful political one—makes sense. These two points are connected, but it is easier to treat the first rather empirically, and then consider the conceptual issue—which is where the dispute with Hall also comes in—separately.

---

<sup>3</sup> In *Thatcherism: A Tale of Two Nations* the authors are primarily concerned with methodological questions. Against Hall, who they consider is excessively if not exclusively concerned with the sphere of ideology, they call for a 'full and complex account' of all aspects of Thatcherism in their dynamic interconnections. However, it is not clear from passages such as the following that the authors have a convincing or even clear general model of these interconnections, with which to replace the now discredited (economistic, reductionist, etc.) base-superstructure model of orthodox political economy: 'The consolidation of an historic bloc depends on the mutual, reciprocal conditioning of economy, state and civil society: it is not to be analysed according to the model of a pre-given economic base and epiphenomenal superstructure but more in line with the contingent co-evolution and structural coupling of different institutions and practices as reinforced and mediated through specific economic, political and ideological practices' (*Ibid.*, p. 162). This seems uncomfortably close to what Russell Jacoby calls 'Marxist voodoo', see his *The Last Intellectuals*, New York 1987, p. 188.

As regards the weakness of the manufacturing sector, it is possible to argue, as Keynesians and neo-Ricardians have consistently done, that the prime determinant of manufacturing growth (and a *sine qua non* for productivity-raising investment) is the maintenance of domestic demand. On this view, Thatcherism's most significant policy towards manufacturing has simply been a classic 'stop-go', which first aggravated the effects of a world-wide trade contraction down to 1981 (so that when the recovery began in 1982 Britain simply started from a lower—and structurally weaker—base) and then overheated the recovery for electoral purposes (the Lawson boom). Other policies favouring the financial and commercial sectors at the expense of manufacturing may also be cited (although some left-wing political economists tend to discount this factor);<sup>4</sup> but the main charge is that the destruction of 1979–1981 had only just been made good eight years later—when another 'stop' called a fresh halt. This view is sceptical about 'supply-side' arguments and tends to be dismissive of claims made about the improvement in manufacturing productivity under Thatcherism.

This is broadly the view of Jessop and his colleagues. But this approach must confront the evidence of the 'impressive annual gains' which, Jessop and co. acknowledge, have occurred in manufacturing productivity since 1981.<sup>5</sup> On this issue they rely heavily on the surveys by Francis Green and his colleagues in *The Restructuring of the UK Economy*, and especially Peter Nolan's discussion, 'The Productivity Miracle?', concluding that while there has been some increase in investment, the productivity increases are due mainly to harder work extracted from a defeated and fearful labour force. The technology involved in the new investment has been geared to exploiting this situation and has not represented a shift towards long-term, higher-tech and higher-wage production; and consequently the productivity gains are not likely to endure.<sup>6</sup> The danger, then, is that in a situation of 'world-wide equalization of wage rates for work of equal low-skill content... only those in the elite high-skill workforces, particularly those able to partake via multinationals in the international rewards for skilled professionals, managers and technicians, will be able to command high and increasing wages. For the rest, a levelling-down to [the wages] received in the emergent developing nations is not so far-fetched in the long run.'<sup>7</sup>

As Nolan acknowledges, these are difficult judgements to make, given the nature of the evidence; other economists (including several he cites) take the view that a supply-side transformation has indeed begun. I want to agree with Nolan and his colleagues, but since the determinants of productivity are so complex and interdependent,

<sup>4</sup> The sceptical view is outlined in Hugo Radice, 'British Capitalism in a Changing Global Economy', in Arthur MacEwan and William K. Tabb, eds., *Instability and Change in the World Economy*, New York 1989, pp. 64–81.

<sup>5</sup> 'Farewell to Thatcherism?', p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Nolan in F. Green, ed., *The Restructuring of the UK Economy*, London 1989, pp. 102, 119.

<sup>7</sup> David Ashton, Francis Green and Martin Hoskins, 'The Training System of British Capitalism: Changes and Prospects', in Green, *Restructuring*, p. 151.

some caution is desirable. It is knocking down a straw man to show that there has been no productivity 'miracle', as Thatcherite rhetoric has sometimes claimed. Nolan concludes, for example, that Thatcherism has not 'transformed the basic character' of British manufacturing; but it would indeed be miraculous if it had, in all the circumstances and in only ten years. This straw man is set against the equally utopian ideal of a 'developmental state' dedicated to a 'root and branch modernization of productive conditions'.<sup>8</sup> As opposed to these pipe dreams, the important question is whether the Thatcherite strategy has contributed anything necessary, let alone sufficient, to the unavoidably long-term processes involved in transforming the basic character of British manufacturing, and this is more difficult to be sure about. When one reads about the changes that have actually been made in a particular industry, it is sometimes hard to know exactly what the companies concerned might have done, other than what they apparently did, and it is difficult to feel sure that the critics know either.<sup>9</sup> The criticism that there has been an 'incremental, piecemeal approach to new investment which, too often, is more concerned with speeding up and intensifying the labour process than with upgrading workers' skills and adding value' is after all a curious one to level at any individual capital.<sup>10</sup> When most manufacturing capitals are organized multinationally, the kinds of investment they make in Britain presumably reflect more or less their relative profitability. What the criticism really seems to imply is the need for action not by individual capitals, but by a 'developmental state', and this brings us to the issue of the standpoint from which Jessop and his colleagues make their critique.

### The Fallacy of the 'National Economy'

Their implicit model of a developmental state, against which the performance of the Thatcher regime is judged, rests on the assumption that in Britain the ultimate objective of any government is the construction of a 'national economy' with a manufacturing sector capable of competing with high-tech competitors anywhere, and hence able to pay high wages while keeping the trade balance healthy. But for most governments in the world today this is not the case: for most of them such an objective is unattainable. For most of them Hugo Radice's observation that in the world economy today 'capitals rather than nation-states are the basic units' is an obvious truism, and their strategies are determined by the necessity to 'reconcile the need to reproduce capitalist-class rule within [their] boundaries, with the

<sup>8</sup> Nolan, 'The Productivity Miracle?', p. 119.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Diane Elson's discussion of restructuring by three clothing and textiles multinationals in Britain, in MacEwan and Tabb, *Instability and Change*, pp. 187–204. Courtaulds, for example, cut its British workforce by 63 per cent (a loss of 78,000 jobs) but spent £120 million on new technology in 1986–89. Jessop and his colleagues perhaps manifest a certain unease too, when in a curious passage they write of 'a pattern of investment that is skewed towards sectors that service the consumption boom', adding that 'this has been *partially disguised* by productivity increases in industrial sectors which have been reorganized since 1981.' 'Farewell to Thatcherism?', p. 92; italics added.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 87.



demands placed by global capitals seeking to accumulate and reproduce on a world-wide basis'.<sup>21</sup> The differing structures and technical bases of their economies, the balance of social and political forces, and the ideas and aspirations to which they can appeal, give rise to a corresponding variety of strategies. Only a few governments, with both the technical-economic resources and a set of social, political and ideological conditions permitting appropriate strategies to be formulated and implemented, can set themselves the objective envisaged by Jessop and co. And the point about Thatcherism is that it more or less consciously rejected that objective. It did not rule it out for ever, but determined that if necessary it should be abandoned, while priority was given to re-establishing the security of capitalist-class rule. And in this, I would argue, it has succeeded far more than Jessop and co. appear to acknowledge.

That is to say, given the need to protect capital from expropriation and make it profitable, while retaining an elected parliamentary system, Thatcherism represented the only option that remained on the agenda in Britain in the mid 1970s. By 1976, capital had exercised an effective veto on the Alternative Economic Strategy, and organized labour had exercised a veto on a market-based strategy. Mrs Thatcher offered to remove labour's veto. Of those voting in 1979, 44 per cent accepted the offer, and the evidence suggests that a significant portion of the rest of the electorate was not inclined to object. No one with a serious power base at that time was offering a third alternative in which capital and labour might both have been prepared to collaborate to produce a different long-term relationship between British society and manufacturing capital, most of which was increasingly transnational. Hence the force of the slogan 'There Is No Alternative'. Additionally, the Thatcherites' hostility to the state rested on more than the belief that it had become deeply tainted with socialist values. Manufacturers in particular had a deep scorn for the incapacity of the civil service to initiate anything useful in the field of production, and the academic evidence (produced by both the Left and the Right) suggested that their attitude was well justified.<sup>22</sup> The option of a state-led strategy of industrial reconstruction on the lines of a developmental state such as Japan or even Germany was ruled out by this fact alone.

To put the matter another way. If we imagine a radical-bourgeois party in command of an industrially oriented technocratic state apparatus, a social-democratic opposition aware of its own need for capitalist accumulation to be sustained, a trade-union movement prepared to negotiate constant changes in work processes to match technological advance (and a managerial class that takes it for granted that capital should share with the state the costs of the retraining and compensation involved), then the Thatcherite obsession with the market, and its indifference to even the long-term infrastructural needs of industry that the market will never provide for, appears more or less

---

<sup>21</sup> Radice, 'British Capitalism', p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> See the writings on the civil service as an instrument of economic modernization by Netti, Balogh, Kelsall, Fairlie, Chapman, Nicholson, Kellner and Hunt, Ponting and a dozen others, not to mention Anderson and Nairn.

irrational and self-destructive. But if these conditions exist today—which is highly debatable—they certainly did not exist in 1979. There is much in the Thatcher record that is driven by class prejudice and the search for an expanded electoral base—from tax, housing and welfare policies to privatization give-aways and the Big Bang—and some of these policies may militate against the long-term needs of manufacturing. But the general thrust of policy has been all too consistently to try to get the market to determine what happens. The failure to initiate a revolution in education and training, or to modernize the public infrastructure, may be partly a pathological by-product of the desire to leave no part of the 'public sector' immune to the threat of market forces, or market-oriented reforms.<sup>13</sup> (It also reflects the idea on the part of some Thatcherites that concerns about 'de-industrialization' are exaggerated, that a shift to services is normal in advanced economies, etc.) But an obsessive commitment to the market did fit the *political* circumstances of the late 1970s. Once electoral acquiescence could be secured, it did not depend on the performance of the higher civil service, or the cooperation of the unions, or the approval of a myriad of vested interests, or indeed on attempts (like the abortive 'Planning Agreements') to persuade multinational corporations to subordinate their global strategies for survival and growth to British national interests.

In short, Thatcherism was a solution to the politics of both power and support (in Gamble's sense of these terms) at 'the intersection of economic and political interests with the "external" world market as bearer of the forces of global competition and accumulation' as it was in Britain at the end of the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> It was a *politically* viable means of breaking the gridlock into which the British system had become jammed by the second half of the 1970s. Where Tom Nairn saw it as capable of being broken up by the forces of nationalism from 'below', the Thatcherites saw it as capable of being broken up, in a different way, by relentless exposure to 'the market' from above. It is not clear that Jessop and his colleagues have an alternative solution to the same problem: that is, of securing electoral support or acquiescence for even a modestly different (modernizing radical-bourgeois state) project. Even if the ideological preconditions for it had been substantially

---

<sup>13</sup> Ashton, Green and Hoskins in 'The Training System of British Capitalism: Changes and Prospects', pp. 131–54, also attribute the Thatcher government's failure to address the need for higher-level training to 'its rigid belief in the ability of market forces to produce a solution to all economic problems' (p. 145), rather than recognize that 'governments with responsibility for training and education are competing with each other in the process of capital accumulation, reflecting capitalist competition' (p. 147). (Evidently Lord Joseph failed to draw Mrs Thatcher's attention to the fact that as early as 1962 [as Chris Freeman notes in the same volume, p. 218] Kenneth Arrow had shown that it was all right for even a neo-liberal state to fund research, basic science and technology, education, training and information services, because the market won't.) It is not necessary to deny the dogmatism of the Thatcherites, which probably is self-destructive in many ways. But the kind of state-led policy of technical-educational modernization that Green and his co-authors have in mind presupposes a level of popular acceptance that the name of the game is to find ways to make one's country attractive to multinational capital, which did not exist in Britain in 1979.

<sup>14</sup> Radice, 'British Capitalism', p. 68.

secured by thirteen years of Thatcherism, and even if—a still more questionable assumption—the British state were now ready and able to play the role of efficient local guide and skills-supplier to advanced global manufacturing corporations, such a project would involve (as a minimum) raising taxes all round, overcoming all sorts of powerful vested interests, advantaging the already advantaged (the south, the educated lower-middle class, etc.). The political dimensions of even this project are far-reaching and as yet, still to be articulated. Yet, unless Jessop and co. have a realistic alternative solution to the political problem to which Thatcherism was a response, it is their critique of Thatcherism which is vulnerable to the charge of idealism, of not reflecting a practical stance in relation to 'what is to be done'.

### In Defence of Hall

It seems to me that this shortcoming is closely connected with their criticism of Hall's alleged 'ideologism', which their own political-economy analysis of Thatcherism is intended to correct.<sup>15</sup> Although they and others may have understood Hall's analysis of 'authoritarian populism' as assuming that Thatcher's project was no more than its ideology, this is not what Hall said. He claimed only to be trying to chart and account for Thatcherism's ideological success (as opposed to its electoral and policy successes), defined in terms of its displacement of the 'common sense' of the postwar social-democratic 'consensus', its ability to 'lead the key sectors, win the strategic engagements . . . stay in front when challenged'—even when far from being universally accepted as itself 'common sense'.<sup>16</sup> He showed persuasively how this depended on the way Thatcherite ideology tapped discontents arising from popular experience in a range of fields extending far beyond what the Left, in general, normally thinks of as 'political', and linked them both to Thatcher's central policy themes and to 'deep', traditional feelings and identities.<sup>17</sup> And he developed a rich problematic of ideological themes, repertoires, articulations, terrains, condensations and the rest, through which, in his hands, the newly emerging linguistic and philosophical theories of signification became potent *practical* tools of ideological understanding and struggle.

As far as I can tell, Hall never, at least by intention, saw authoritarian populism as 'pure' discourse, but always and only as a dimension of material practices, with material conditions of effectiveness, however he may have been understood. He does not believe, he has written, 'that just anything can be articulated with everything else': on the

<sup>15</sup> There is a small act of reparation involved here. In their exchange with Hall in *NLR* 165, Jessop and co. cited an article by me as an example of a superior approach to the concept of hegemony to that of Hall. I was uncomfortable about this not because I thought everything they said was wrong but because I thought they were attributing to Hall ideas which he did not hold, and missing the point of some of those he did. Hall, of course, needs no defence from anyone else, but I am glad of a chance to indicate my indebtedness to his work, an analytic *tour de force* worthy of Gramsci who inspired it (but much more entertaining).

<sup>16</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Faith, Hope and Clarity', *Marxism Today*, December 1985, cited in Jessop et al., *Thatcherism*, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, *The Hard Road to Reason*, Verso, London 1988, pp. 33–36 and *passim*.

contrary, 'all discourse has "conditions of existence" which...set limits or constraints on the process of articulation itself.'<sup>18</sup> He frequently explored the relationship between 'material realities' and Thatcherite ideological victories (not excluding luck: Mrs Thatcher was lucky to have the Falklands invaded, perhaps, and lucky to win the war; but its ideological exploitation was not a matter of luck). But what his work as a whole is intended to show is that *the opposite is also true*: that material initiatives and policies have *ideological* conditions of existence. That is to say, Thatcher could not have done what she has without the successful prior and continuing ideological offensive: she could not have won the elections and she could not have carried through the radical—in British terms, revolutionary—economic and political changes she has, without discrediting and displacing the ideological defences of the structures she set out to dismantle. And this lesson, he believes, the Left has yet to learn: 'it is not convinced that it cannot continue in the old way. In many of its leading echelons it does not possess a hegemonic conception of political strategy.'<sup>19</sup> Further, 'in the struggle for ideas, the battle for hearts and minds which the Right has been conducting with such considerable effect, bad ideas can only be displaced by better, more appropriate ones.'<sup>20</sup>

Not only is it a question of doing more than proposing better *policies*: 'What Thatcherism as an ideology does, is to address the fears, the anxieties, the lost identities, of a people... It is addressed to our collective fantasies, to Britain as an imagined country, to the social imaginary. Mrs Thatcher has totally dominated that idiom, while the Left forlornly tries to drag the conversation round to "our policies".'<sup>21</sup> It is also a question of realizing that the whole project, the policies, and the core ideas to which they are articulated, must be *constructed*: it is never there, implicit in 'the facts of the situation'. Its construction is an ideological task, as much as an analytic and practical one, and for the Left it is now extraordinarily radical. Not only is there no longer any 'socialist man', there is no 'automatic' support for Labour, even in the so-called 'heartlands', no 'working-class vote', indeed no 'natural majority' for anything.<sup>22</sup>

After Labour's recent advances, this might seem exaggerated, but let us see. It must be said that if Jessop and co. have been greatly influenced by Hall (as they have stated), it is not apparent in their recent work, which not only neglects ideology almost completely, but discounts it insofar as it refers to it at all. In their recent article, for instance, they state that the evidence is that Thatcherism was never 'hegemonic', 'and all the surveys point towards steadily declining levels of popular support'.<sup>23</sup> Thatcherism did not, apparently, involve any ideological effort: 'any hegemony which Thatcherism ever

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169–70, 207, 260, 281.

<sup>23</sup> 'Farewell to Thatcherism?', p. 83.

enjoyed came from the voice it gave to widespread discontent with the sclerotic, bureaucratic postwar settlement and the effects of economic decline.<sup>24</sup>

Ironically, this casual occlusion of the whole Thatcherite ideological offensive from the mid 1970s onwards—from the groundwork of the New Right think-tanks, through Keith Joseph's speech-making crusade, to carefully planned media campaigns and the winning over of key opinion-leaders—suggests the extent to which Thatcherism *has* become hegemonic. Viewed from the vantage point of the 'political economy' approach practised by Jessop and co., the means by which the discontents of the 1960s and 1970s were articulated with each other and unified in certain powerful ways, and linked to a project for radical social change—involving a successful assault on vital institutions, from local democracy to redistributive taxation and public ownership (institutions which, the authors now maintain, people have never stopped valuing)—all this seems now to have occurred 'naturally'. It was just a question of 'giving voice' to already-given 'discontent'.

### Labour's Adjustment to Thatcherism

It may seem perverse to suggest that Thatcherism is now relatively hegemonic, when the voters seem so anxious for a change. But for an ideology to be hegemonic, it is not necessary that it be loved. It is merely necessary that it have no serious rival. And is this not, nowadays, roughly the situation with Thatcherism? Is it a false perception on the part of the capitalist press that the Labour Party, following the Policy Review, and under Kinnock's tight management, has broadly conceded all the main changes so far made by Thatcherism, because in the judgement of Kinnock and his advisors this is necessary if the Party is to be elected?<sup>25</sup> Could there be more eloquent testimony to the hegemonic strength of Thatcherism? Jessop and his colleagues appear to take attitude-survey evidence (which shows that most people favour the welfare state and dislike individualism) as showing that 'Thatcherism' is no longer hegemonic, if it ever was. But many of these same people refrained from voting for the party committed to the welfare state in three crucial elections, and seem to have drifted back towards Labour more or less in step with the Party's gradual acceptance of the Thatcherite 'settlement'. It would be a big mistake to imagine that the 'discontents' revealed in the opinion polls express ready-made support for an alternative strategy for economic transformation, on the lines favoured by Jessop and his colleagues, which has only to be 'given voice'.<sup>26</sup> It is not self-evident that if, as seems

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. *The Economist's* commentary on the Labour Party Conference, 7 October 1989.

<sup>26</sup> According to Baudrillard the problem with opinion polls is that they 'do not act in the time-space of will and of representation where judgement is formed. . . , [the] lack of relationship between the two systems [that is, of polls, and the sphere in which we form judgements] . . . today plunges us into a state of radical uncertainty as to our own desire, our own choice, our own opinion, our own will' (Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, Stanford 1988, p. 209). Perhaps, as he suggests, the British voters who have been telling pollsters they would sooner pay more taxes for better services, but have not voted for the party that would do this, have been engaged in a form of revenge against the hyperreality of postmodern society?

likely, the most undereducated third of the British population are destined for a further lurch down the international scale of relative prosperity, Labour will find itself automatically mandated to do what is necessary to reverse this.

Yet, consistently enough, Jessop and his colleagues do not seem to think that a new project must be constructed and struggled for ideologically. They write instead of the need for the 'medium term priorities of any incoming government' to be 'productivist: concerned with the conditions for economic modernization and the state capacities and popular mobilization that will promote this modernization. This does not mean that social and economic justice and welfare will be impossible . . . [etc.]'.<sup>27</sup> They wrote in the same way in *Thatcherism* of the *needs* that exist for new policies: for left policies on democratizing the state, raising productivity, reforming social welfare, and so on.<sup>28</sup> But these 'needs' are not the 'felt needs' of the voters, they are the desiderata of a particular model of state-led modernizing social-democracy, which is in reality full of contradictions and difficulties, and which must be developed and articulated with needs that really are widely felt, and aspirations that are widely shared—all of which in turn can only be the products of persistent ideological *construction*.

I don't want to exaggerate the differences involved here. Jessop and his colleagues offer a persuasive analysis of the contradictions of Thatcherite economic policy, but they also recognize the durability of many of thatcher's reforms and, in particular, changes in the state which create new obstacles to the pursuit of the kind of radical industrial strategy that is needed. They are perfectly clear that the Labour Party has not produced a potentially hegemonic counter-ideology and counter-strategy. They contemplate, in effect, only a more 'productivist' set of policies for manufacturing, laced with a modicum of 'social and economic justice and welfare measures', introduced by whatever party is next in office. Perhaps this is realistic. It may be roughly what the electoral market can bear at this stage. It is not, however, something that international capitals *want* (they take social formations as they find them), and it is hardly what socialists want. Perhaps the idea of formulating a *socialist* project, capable of being pursued in the context of the global market economy, with the long-term goal of recovering control over that market, and hence over our lives, now seems simply a fantastic dream. But if the lessons of Thatcherism are to be learned with such a project in mind, we have to be clear what building one involves. This is both a question of assessing what kinds of 'virtuous circle' can be realistically initiated in the short term—the problem of finding new ways to neutralize the British system's overwhelmingly powerful tendency to restore the status quo—and of facing the enormity of the long-run ideological task: the construction of a new 'social imaginary', capable of carrying a whole population forward, over the long term, making rational and bearable the costs involved in finding a different way for the 'internal' and 'external' worlds to intersect.

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>28</sup> *Thatcherism*, pp. 122–24.

# 182 *new left review*

## DIPLOMACIES OF COERCION

James Dunkerley	Reflections on Nicaragua
Peter Gowan	The Pressure on East Europe
Synne Jones	Murder in Guatemala
Otto Latsis	Communism in Latvia
Alice Amsden	South Korean Capitalism
Gerry Anderson	A Culture in Contraflow—II

E.P. Thompson/Fred Halliday The Ends of Cold War

£3.50

\$6.50

ISSN 0028-6060

182/1990

1		<i>Themes</i>
4		Tamara Deutscher: 1913–1990
5	<i>Alice H. Amsden</i>	Third World Industrialization: 'Global Fordism' or a New Model?
33	<i>James Dunkerley</i>	Reflections on the Nicaraguan Election
53	<i>Lynne Jones</i>	SCANNER Murder in Guatemala
63	<i>Peter Gowan</i>	Western Economic Diplomacy and the New Eastern Europe
85	<i>Perry Anderson</i>	A Culture in Contraflow—II
139	<i>Edward Thompson</i>	COMMENT The Ends of Cold War
147	<i>Fred Halliday</i>	A Reply to Edward Thompson
152	<i>Otto Latsis</i>	DOCUMENT Farewell to the Communist Party in Latvia

<i>Editor</i>	Robin Blackburn
<i>Editorial Committee</i>	Patrick Camiller, Alexander Cockburn, Mike Davis, Peter Dews, Diane Elson, Norman Geras, Quentin Hoare, Oliver MacDonald, Bronka Margul, Ellen Meiksins Wood
<i>Associate Editors</i>	Perry Anderson, Tariq Ali
<i>Editorial communications</i>	6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR
<i>Subscription correspondence</i>	120–126 Lavender Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HP (Tel 081-646 6672)
<i>Business Manager</i>	Robin Gable
<i>Advertising Manager</i>	Arthur Boyars
<i>American Distributor</i>	B de Boer, 113 East Center Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA

<i>NLR Prices</i>	<i>Individual subscription</i>	<i>Institutional subscription:</i>
<i>Inland (UK/Eire)</i>	£17	£33
<i>Europe (air)</i>		
<i>Rest of World (ASP)</i>	£21 or US\$33	£37 or US\$58
<i>USA &amp; Canada</i>		
<i>(Airmail)</i>	£21 or US\$33 or Can\$40	£37 or US\$58
<i>Airmail overseas</i>	£29 or US\$45 or Can\$55	£45 or US\$70

MICROFICHE SETS 1–180 (1960–1990), incl. cased index £350 (inland), £365/US\$600 (overseas)

INDEX 1–180 (1960–1990). *Inland* £28 (cloth), £13 (paper) *Overseas*: £31/US\$50 (cloth), £15/US\$24 (paper)

New Left Review (ISSN 0028-6060) is published bi-monthly by New Left Review Ltd, 6 Meard St, London W1V 3HR, UK. Annual subscription price in the USA and Canada is US\$33 for individuals, US\$58 for institutions, including airspeed delivery. Second-class postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431. USA POSTMASTERS: Send address changes to New Left Review, Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by Publications Expediting Inc., 200 Meacham Ave., Elmont, NY 11003. Printed in Great Britain.



Understanding Western policy towards Eastern Europe is not easy. The West has won the Cold War, and the new governments in Eastern Europe are eager to establish free-market economies. Under such circumstances it might be thought that the West owed it to Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in particular to treat them with appropriate generosity. But while there has been much talk of new Marshall plans, so far precious little has been done for the aspiring new members of the capitalist world. As Peter Gowan shows in this issue, the onerous debts contracted by the former regimes have not been 'forgiven'. Their requests for membership of the European Community have been rebuffed, and Brussels has offered only highly selective and quite temporary alleviation of the commercial exclusions and restrictions they face. A formidable machinery of economic coercion is instead being deployed to oblige them to privatize more rapidly, to raise prices more stiffly and to end the economic life-support system of the institutions of civil society. Newspapers and publishing houses are closing—or being handed over to the tender mercies of Murdoch or Maxwell. Under remorseless pressure from the international financial community, theatre groups and research institutes are being dispersed, welfare commitments scrapped and historic assets sold for a pittance, sometimes to former members of the nomenklatura. As Gowan acknowledges, identification with socialism in the region has dropped close to zero. Yet the West continues to demand the most unreasonable guarantees of good capitalist behaviour.

Peter Gowan suggests that one element of the explanation for this conduct is that the West still feels that the ghost of collectivism has not been fully laid to rest. It arises not from the intentions of the major political actors but rather from the legacy of social arrangements and institutions which are not yet organized in a capitalist fashion. Moreover, political opinion remains volatile and unpredictable. The West would not welcome democratic forms of collectivism, and thus Western leverage aims to uproot it beyond hope of rehabilitation. When it comes to money, the meanness, and indeed indigence, of several key public treasuries may also play a part. Of the NATO governments, only the

German has large resources readily available and these are now earmarked for unification and its associated diplomacy. Agricultural and industrial vested interests also help to block any real opening of Western markets. Yet if larger views were to prevail, there can be no doubt that the development of Eastern Europe could and should lift the spectre of stagnation that was haunting the European economy prior to the events of 1989. On 6 July the Socialist Group in Brussels sponsored a seminar on aid to the East which showed some awareness of this fact, but the gesture came too late to save the Eastern social democrats from electoral debacle. And it is far from clear what, if any, action will ensue. The peoples of Eastern Europe, recently so hopeful, seem now condemned to a capitalist purgatory, or limbo.

In NLR 180 we published contrasting assessments of the ending of the Cold War by Fred Halliday and Mary Kaldor. In this issue Edward Thompson, who has done so much to challenge nuclear militarism, disputes what he sees as the overly pessimistic conclusions proposed by Halliday with his argument that the peace movements made little or no contribution to the dramatic overturns of 1989. Fred Halliday in his reply defends his original position. Perhaps the truth lies in between: while the peace movements were a factor in precipitating the events of 1989, they have had a negligible role in determining the new settlements of 1990. To the extent that Halliday is right in denying influence to the peace movements, we should expect the new international environment to have ignored their concerns. So far NATO remains in place, as does the worldwide network of US military bases. The international arms trade continues and the potential for nuclear proliferation grows. To date, Western arms budgets are being maintained at something very like the old level. Both Britain and France retain nuclear weapons and plan to modernize them. There seems no prospect of British troops withdrawing from Germany or of the defence budget dropping below £20 billion. As the peace dividend recedes and new dangers loom, the conditions for political mobilization on anti-militarist questions will return.

Alice Amsden's study of South Korea demonstrates, among other things, how little the remarkable rise of this capitalist state has owed to the doctrines of *laissez faire*. In a powerful account she examines the educational programmes, export subsidies and measures for disciplining big business which have helped to promote South Korean growth. She also argues that the specific features of this development contradict the over-generalized theory of 'peripheral Fordism' proposed by the Regulation

School. While socialists would certainly not wish to recommend the South Korean package, with its very undemocratic features, nevertheless it does suggest the originality of a development path that owed nothing to the free market. Through the study of the South Korean example, Amsden sheds light on a new pattern of late industrialization, elements of which can be identified in other parts of the formerly underdeveloped world.

It is now beginning to be possible to gain a perspective on the bitterly disappointing defeat of the Sandinistas in the February election. That vicious intimidation by the Contras and their US backers should be rewarded with any success is deeply disturbing, but it now appears that Sandinismo remains a decisive force while UNO is revealed as a divided and incoherent coalition. In a fine reflection on the long-range implications of the Nicaraguan experience, James Dunkerley argues that revolutionary politics in Central America today, no less than in the past require an ability both to listen and to fight. In a complementary report from Guatemala, Lynne Jones points to the undeclared war waged against peasant movements there which resulted in at least 2,000 deaths last year alone.

With his essay in this issue, Perry Anderson resumes and concludes the study of British intellectual culture which he embarked on in NLR 180. While the first part was mainly devoted to sociology and anthropology the second surveys work in aesthetics, philosophy, history, economics and feminism.

Finally, we publish an article by Otto Latsis on his native Latvia, which originally appeared in *Izvestiya*. Drawing on personal experience and family history, he argues against both Russian chauvinism and the identitarian intolerance of nationalists in a state where the minorities comprise well over 40 per cent of the population.

## Tamara Deutscher: 1913–1990

It is with great sadness that we learn of the death of Tamara Deutscher, whose counsel and encouragement have meant so much to this Review over a period of a quarter of a century.

In the early and mid sixties the editors felt privileged to be able to call upon the political experience and wisdom of Tamara and her husband, Isaac. Their Marxism, tempered by the bitter experiences of the thirties and forties, embodied outstanding integrity, steadfastness and lucidity. After Isaac's death in 1967, Tamara continued their life's work, reflecting on the fate of the Russian Revolution and the socialist tradition.

Tamara contributed fifteen essays to the Review between 1968 and 1987, constituting a remarkable critical panorama of trends within Soviet society and, especially, the Soviet intelligentsia. The memoirs of Anatole Marchenko and Nadezhda Mandelstam allowed her to explore the contrasting worlds of worker and writer. The 1970 manifesto issued by Sakharov, Medvedev and Turchin led her to timely conclusions concerning what would be needed for a genuine democratic reform in the Soviet Union. Essays by Amalrik and Solzhenitsyn prompted analysis of the forms of oppositional demoralization and despair generated by bureaucratic stasis. In a recent review article on Grossman's *Life and Fate*, Tamara reflected on the traumas of war and terror. Though she escaped on one of the last ships to leave the south of France for Liverpool in 1940, her own experiences, and the losses suffered within the circle of her family and friends, added depth to her understanding of these terrible times. Tamara also wrote for us following visits to China and Ceylon. She contributed a memoir of her collaboration with E.H. Carr, and two articles about her native Poland. Elsewhere she contributed a preface to David King's portfolio, *Trotsky*, and wrote about Rosa Luxemburg, whose characteristic universalism she found admirable and salutary.

Tamara encouraged the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize committee to identify new and creative work in the Marxist tradition, and was especially gratified when the prize was awarded to a young Soviet author, Boris Kagarlitsky, for his book *The Thinking Reed*.

Tamara's generosity and judgement will be sorely missed. Her serenity, consideration and insight made her an irreplaceable guide and friend. The classical socialist traditions and values she upheld so courageously remain, through her example, a vital inspiration.

## Third World Industrialization: 'Global Fordism' or a New Model?

From the 1960s to the 1970s, industrial output in almost all Third World countries grew rapidly. Growth was especially fast in a subset of developing countries that can be called 'late industrializers', countries which industrialized without the competitive asset of being able to monopolize an original technology. Late industrializers include South Korea—the subject of this article—Taiwan, India, Brazil, Mexico, and possibly Turkey. (Japan also qualifies as a late-industrializing country because it, too, started to grow without indigenous technology.) Since the 1980s, stagnation has afflicted the economies of most late-industrializing countries and those of the Third World in general. Yet Korea and Taiwan have continued to grow very rapidly, posing a special puzzle for those who seek to understand different patterns of growth in the world today. Dependency theories of economic development, for instance, have been unable to explain East Asia's rapid growth, predicting instead underdevelopment as a consequence of international trade and foreign indebtedness; yet exports have been pivotal in the

rapid economic expansion of all the East Asian countries, and Korea's economy has also been highly leveraged on international loans. Nor have market theories of economic growth demonstrated greater explanatory power.

The most orthodox economists have interpreted East Asian expansion as a vindication of free-market principles. 'Export-led' growth is seen as reflecting comparative advantage, a pillar of free-market theory.<sup>1</sup> More broad-minded economists among the orthodox have been less complacent, however, recognizing the need to modify the free-market explanation because government intervention in the fast-growing East Asian economies has been so extensive. Nevertheless, such economists have argued that despite this widespread government intervention, the East Asian economies have not violated the canons of free-market theory and have 'got relative prices right'; that is, they have allowed the forces of supply and demand to push prices of key resources, such as foreign exchange and capital, close to their equilibrium or scarcity levels. They argue that conformity to free-market principles is what accounts for East Asia's rapid economic advance.

In fact, there is little evidence to support the more liberal of the orthodox interpretations. In the case of Korea's exchange rate, even if it were never grossly over- or under-valued, exporters were generously subsidized by the government and strongly coerced to export through an export targeting system. Thus, the amount of exports and the dollar price received for them were highly politicized outcomes. In the capital market, government policy was equally 'distortive'. One of the first acts of the Korean strongman, Park Chung Hee, after he seized power in a coup d'état in 1961, was to nationalize the banking system. This gave him control over domestic interest rates, exclusive of those which prevailed on an informal 'curb' market. He also gained control over the allocation of foreign loans, targeting them to specific industries earmarked for development, and even to specific firms that were both efficient and generous friends. He gained control over foreign-loan allocation because foreign lenders required government guarantees of repayment in the case of default, and the Korean government used its guarantee powers to determine which firms could borrow abroad.

Because the rate of inflation exceeded the rate of currency depreciation, the real interest rate in Korea on long-term foreign loans throughout most of the expansionary decades of the 1960s and 1970s was *negative*. In a capital-scarce country, a negative real interest rate on investment capital cannot be interpreted as allowing the forces of supply and demand to operate. A multiplicity of prices in the capital market for loans of the same maturity—one for foreign loans, one for domestic commercial bank loans, and one for 'curb' or informal loans—suggests that not all prices could possibly have been 'right'.

In all late-industrializing countries—Japan, Korea, and Taiwan included—not only have governments failed to get relative prices right, they

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, B. Balassa, 'Export Incentives and Export Performance in Developing Countries: A Comparative Analysis', *Wirtschaftliches Archiv*, 114, 1978; *Development Strategies in Semi-Industrial Countries*, Baltimore 1981.

have deliberately got them 'wrong', in order to stimulate investment and trade.<sup>2</sup> They have subsidized the price of capital and exports. The faster growth of the East Asian countries is therefore attributable less to freer markets than to the institutions that have allowed subsidies to be allocated more effectively than elsewhere. Consequently, an analysis of disparate growth rates among late-industrializing countries requires an institutional approach.

I shall be concerned in what follows with two institutional approaches to late industrialization: one which has been called 'global Fordism', and which I would like to criticize because I think it has no explanatory or predictive power; and another, derived from a particular dynamic of institutions and class relations, which, I shall argue, furnishes a properly substantive account.

### Global Fordism

The notion of 'global Fordism' is linked to the larger Regulation School of analysis only in so far as its major expositor, Alain Lipietz, has chosen to situate his writing within a regulation framework. Not all regulation theorists, however, accept the global-Fordist extension of their work.<sup>3</sup> Nor does the regulation framework adopted by Lipietz necessarily represent the most persuasive version of regulation theory.

The chief elements of the global-Fordist version of regulation may be summarized as follows. The experience of mass-production industries in the United States—call it *Fordism*—is the point of departure for understanding Third World development. Mass-production technology created unprecedented increases in output based on *Taylorism*, which comprises two parts: the decomposition of jobs into their smallest constituent units; and top-down management. The de-skilling of jobs and top-down management, however, create downward pressure on wages, such that the mass consumption necessary to sustain mass production is jeopardized. Global Fordism uses a regulation approach to the extent that history is understood as a series of episodes. Each episode is defined by a certain *regime of accumulation*, or production system, in association with a certain *mode of regulation*, or institutional framework. Sometimes the association between the two favours growth, sometimes it favours stagnation. The postwar prosperity of the USA is regarded as one wherein Fordist institutions (say, industrial unions) favoured mass consumption, allowing mass production to proceed apace in a Golden Age of unprecedented expansion.

Global Fordism, as expounded by Alain Lipietz, brings mass production, the two parts of Taylorism, and a concern for underconsumption, to the Third World. Lipietz's analysis is 'global' to the extent that Third World development is understood in terms of relations

---

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 6, 'Getting Relative Prices "Wrong"—A Summary', in A.H. Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*, Oxford 1989.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, R. Boyer, *La théorie de la Régulation: Une analyse critique*, Paris 1986, pp. 112–13.

between the centre and the periphery, in the grand tradition of the *dependencia* theory he so deplores:

I will attempt to present, succinctly and in schematic form, the results of my work on how the present crisis [in the centre] is transforming the international division of labour. I will not venture so far as to make a concrete analysis of the one hundred and fifty countries that make up the world or of their irreducible specificities . . . I will cast caution to the winds. I will talk about old and new divisions of labour, the centre, the periphery, Fordism, 'bloody Taylorism', peripheral Fordism and other bold conceptualizations . . . The reader has been warned. She would do better to burn this book without reading it, if all she is going to get out of it is a new collection of labels to stick on real nations and actually existing international relations without first analysing them carefully.<sup>4</sup>

I must confess that this reader, for one, found no more than labels in Lipietz's book—labels, moreover, which are no substitute for a theory of industrialization.

### Peripheral Fordism

Together with the other late-industrializing countries, Korea has progressed well beyond the stage of producing labour-intensive manufactures. The country is possibly the world's lowest cost steel producer, and has invested heavily in steel-making R&D. The Korean car that is a hot seller in the low-price range in the United States and Europe is made with Mitsubishi Motors engine technology. Nevertheless, most of the car is indigenously engineered by Hyundai Motors. Korea's huge electronics firms have moved beyond consumer electronics assembly and have begun to produce semiconductors and complex industrial electronics systems. Their R&D laboratories are run by Korean-Americans with long experience in high-tech companies. Their joint ventures in Silicon Valley infuse technology at the world frontier. These developments are rather remarkable given the chronic underdevelopment throughout most of the Third World, and they demand careful analysis. Lipietz labels such developments *peripheral Fordism*:

In the 1970s a new pattern emerged in certain countries. It was characterized by the existence of autonomous local capital and by the presence of a sizeable middle class, and a significant element of a skilled working class. In some cases, its origins lay in an earlier import-substitution policy or in a peripheral form of merchant capitalism (Chinese in Eastern Asia). In other cases, it emerged from the 'miraculous' promotion of exports of raw materials such as oil or from an earlier stage of primitive Taylorization. This conjuncture allowed certain states to develop a new logic which we will refer to as 'peripheral Fordism' (p. 79).

According to Lipietz, peripheral Fordism is a 'true Fordism in that it involves both mechanization and a combination of intensive accumulation and a growing market for consumer durables' (p. 78).

---

<sup>4</sup> Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crisis of Global Fordism*, Verso, London 1987, pp. 4–5. Subsequent references to this work appear in parentheses in the text.



It is true that production in sectors ranging from automobiles, machinery, steel, petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals may be described as 'mechanized' or mass-produced. These industries generate high levels of productivity by virtue of their skill- and capital-intensive production processes. But to recognize and label the emergence of more complex production in the Third World as 'peripheral Fordism' is not to explain it. Lipietz has no more to say about the origins of mass production in the Third World than the stark references cited above. He simply states that in some cases mass production came from 'an earlier import-substitution policy', but he does not explain how, or why, it developed in some countries and not in others. In some cases it emerged from a 'peripheral form of merchant capitalism (Chinese in Eastern Asia)', whatever this befogged phraseology might mean, and in others it emerged from the export of raw materials such as oil (presumably Lipietz has in mind Mexico, or the Bombay region of India). But it is not made clear how oil money was translated into manufacturing investments, or why some oil-producing countries fared better than others. In other cases mass production emerged from 'an earlier stage of primitive Taylorization' (read *maquiladoras* or export-processing zones). For such a 'bold conceptualization' as peripheral Fordism, and for such a rare occurrence as Third World industrialization, these strands of explanation are woefully inadequate.

According to Lipietz, 'primitive Taylorization' refers to the transfer of specific segments of branch circuits 'to states with high rates of exploitation (in terms of wages, length of the working day and labour intensity)' (p. 74). In other words, primitive or 'bloody' Taylorization refers to investments, often by multinational firms, in labour-intensive production processes in the Third World, with a view towards re-export to the advanced countries. Analytically, however, 'peripheral Fordism' cannot be seen as a logical extension of 'primitive Taylorism', as Lipietz implies. Even in Korea, Taiwan and Northern Mexico, which the multinationals favoured as locations for their labour-intensive production, such investments were only a small fraction of these countries' total investments. Moreover, a country like India has a large industrial sector but virtually no export-processing activity. In another case, Puerto Rico, the *maquiladoras* have been omnipresent but economic development has floundered. Thus, no relationship between 'peripheral Fordism' and 'primitive Taylorization' can be assumed a priori. Nor can one attribute the emergence of mass production in a country like Korea to the multinational firm. Skill- and capital-intensive production in Korea is not dominated by the multinationals. Multinational investment has largely been restricted to labour-intensive exports. By contrast, the 'commanding heights' are owned and controlled by local firms: privately in Korea and Japan; publicly in Taiwan.

Lipietz provides no explanation for how mass production or an 'intensive' regime of accumulation arose in late industrialization. None is forthcoming because his methodology is one of trying to understand the periphery in terms of the centre. For example, he states in his introduction: 'The fourth chapter brings us to the heart of our subject: the novel phenomenon of the partial industrialization of

the Third World, *which will be shown to be the result of the various ways in which elements of the logic of Fordism have been extended to the periphery*' (p. 6, emphasis added). The rise of Third World industry, therefore, is seen by Lipietz as a response to the ever-present, proverbial crisis in the centre. Industry in the Third World arises as capital from the centre extends the 'scale' of its operations in a search for new markets and cheap labour. Chapter Four does not end, therefore, with a summary of how late industrialization occurred, or why some late industrializers grew faster than others. Instead, it concludes with a discussion of the extent to which the South serves the North as a market in the 'new' international division of labour (new because some Third World countries now compete as manufacturers). We know in retrospect from the failure of dependency theory that the dynamics of growth in the Third World cannot be analysed satisfactorily in terms of the categories of 'centre' and 'periphery'. To the extent that Lipietz employs these categories, he is a dependency theorist, and no more successful than they in explaining Third World industrialization.

### The Fordist Model Abroad

To understand the process of late industrialization, one must learn from the history of earlier industrializing countries. The failure of the market paradigm to explain Korea's industrialization suggests the need for an institutional approach. The model of Fordism derived from US twentieth-century history does not, however, have predictive power when applied to the Third World, despite its rich institutional orientation. The institutions of late industrialization are quite different from those of the Second Industrial Revolution in the United States. Firstly, the Fordist model regards underconsumption as the major stumbling block to economic growth; whereas the problem of industrialization in the Third World is a problem of *raising productivity and creating international competitiveness*, not effective demand. Secondly, late industrialization has been a far more political process than the entrepreneurially driven model of American Fordism would suggest. The state has masterminded late industrialization with varying degrees of success. Finally, American, Korean and Japanese factories in the mass-production industries all have similar technology, employ time-and-motion studies, and practise scientific management. 'Taylorist' nuances, however, are quite distinct to the extent that productivity growth differs significantly. We will now look in more detail at the problems evident in transferring the Fordist model from one country and time period to another, with respect to underconsumption, the state, and Taylorism. Later these subjects will reappear in discussions of Korea.

#### (i) Underconsumption

The subject of underconsumption in the Third World is not analysed systematically by Lipietz, but it provides a leitmotif in most of his chapters. For example, he states:

The term 'peripheral Fordism' should only be used when growth in the

home market for manufactured goods plays a real part in the national regime of accumulation. In this context, it should be noted that South Korea, which some writers insist upon calling a workshop country because of the primitive Taylorization that exists in some segments of the transferred labour-intensive industries, departed from the Taylorist schema long ago. That schema characterized its growth in the period between 1962 and 1972. Since 1973, growth has centred on the home market. . . . Real wages, which had been rising more slowly than productivity, took off in 1976, so much so that they began to threaten South Korea's competitiveness vis-à-vis Taiwan (p. 80).

In fact, since 1973, when Korea began investing heavily in basic and, later, computer-based industries, growth has not been centred on the home market. Korea now exports more capital- and skill-intensive products than light manufactures; and total exports as a percentage of GNP are approximately 35 per cent—far higher than Lipietz allows. Moreover, wages began to rise rapidly in the mid 1960s, but have not yet undermined Korea's international competitiveness. Real average wages in Korea, as we will see below, appear to have risen faster than in any previous industrialization *and in any contemporary one*. They have grown far faster than in other late-industrializing countries such as Brazil and India, which have grown largely on the basis of the home market and which depend more on high wage increases to shore up effective demand. Contrary to the Fordist story, therefore, which sees the forces of mass production outstripping the capacity of workers to consume, high productivity in Korea has sustained high growth rates of both exports and wages.

To reject an underconsumptionist theory of industrialization is not to underestimate the problems posed to expansion by impoverished home markets, or to dismiss too readily the influence of income distribution on what products can profitably be produced.<sup>5</sup> Nor is it to minimize the struggle of capitalists the world over to find markets for their output. But in terms of a disequilibrium between what a Third World country can produce and what it can sell, the underconsumptionist argument is untenable. The problem in developing countries is not that of too little effective demand but of too much, as different income groups and social classes struggle over the distribution of a puny pie. Governments are not confronted with the need to raise effective demand, but rather to dampen aggregate spending in order to check inflation. What they must raise is more foreign exchange, savings and public revenues; for these, and not effective demand, are the constraints on increasing the pie's absolute size. Moreover, any country, particularly a small one, can produce without regard to the size of its home market, so long as it can export. The problem is that most Third World countries cannot export because they are not competitive internationally, despite low wage rates. Nor can they sell domestically at international prices, at high levels of productivity that would enable them to pay high wages and expand their internal

<sup>5</sup> For a critique of Latin American underconsumption theory, see N. Lustig, *Distribución del ingreso y crecimiento en México: Un análisis de las tesis estructuralistas*, Mexico 1981; 'Underconsumption in American Economic Thought', *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12 (1) 1980.

market size. Ultimately, therefore, as the Korea experience suggests, the problem of industrialization is a problem of increasing productivity, not demand.

## (2) *The State*

According to Lipietz, both primitive Taylorism and peripheral Fordism require a state that is 'autonomous' in three senses: 'First, the regime must be politically autonomous from traditional forms of foreign domination... Secondly, the political regime must be autonomous from ruling classes connected with either the primary export economy or the growth of the home market... Finally, the regime must also be autonomous from the popular masses... In short, it usually requires a *dictatorship* to break the old balance and to use the state to create managerial personnel who can play the part of the ruling classes within a new regime of accumulation' (pp. 72-73).

I agree with Lipietz that the relative 'autonomy' of the state was decisive in Korea's rapid growth, compared with that of other late-industrializing countries. Nevertheless, the category of 'autonomy', even in a non-idealized form, is insufficient to understand the late-industrializing state. Significant industrial growth has been achieved in India on the basis of parliamentary democracy, not dictatorship, and Mexico has registered industrial advance with a constitutionalist regime. Lipietz focuses on the degree of state power to the exclusion of two other critical issues related to the state: the conditions under which strong states act 'developmentally', investing long-term rather than speculating; and the precise policies which the developmental state follows in order to further industrial growth.

Nor, more generally, does the model of American Fordism provide sharp insights into the role of the state in economic development. The state's role in the United States in the era of mass production was largely one of creating effective demand in response to crisis, and of regulating business in the American sense of the term—supporting competitive market structures. By contrast, the state's role in late industrialization has been far more comprehensive. The state is the principal initiator of industrial growth, and state control over big business in Japan, Korea and Taiwan is much broader than that of American-style regulation. Support for business is also greater than what was typically meant by 'infant industry protection'.

## (3) *Taylorism in the Fordist Factory*

The global-Fordist model is as flat-footed at the level of the firm as it is at the level of the state. Taylorist institutions, strictly defined in the American tradition, have *never* been exported to the mass-production factories of Japan, Korea or Taiwan. It is true that jobs in mass-production industries in these countries have been industrially engineered for maximum efficiency. But work has not been managed in a top-down fashion. Technical ignorance at the highest managerial level, and inexperience on the part of the workforce, have made it

impossible for borrowed technology to be optimized through a top-down, Taylorist approach to productivity and quality improvements. Instead, the standardization of work has been accompanied by a more participatory (and, it turns out, more productive) approach to work relations, not for cultural reasons but for reasons related to technology transfer.<sup>6</sup>

Not even the kernel of Fordism itself holds up well in the Third World, where the essence of Fordism is higher wages and better working conditions in the mass-production industries than in the 'bloody Taylorized' industries like electronics assembly and apparel. Of course, long before Lipietz's labelling, it was widely recognized that the labour markets of the Third World, not least that of South Korea, were segmented by wage rates—along lines of gender, capital-intensity, and possibly firm size. Real wages have risen faster in South Korea than in any previous or contemporary industrializing country, but South Korea also holds the dubious distinction of having one of the largest wage gaps between men and women (between 40 and 50 per cent) and between labour-intensive and capital-intensive manufacturing branches.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Fordism is an inappropriate label to append even to the situation of the highest paid workers in Korea, because they have been subject no less than other workers to forms of abuse that are incompatible with the notion of a Fordist aristocracy or elite. High wages and ill-treatment have coexisted in mass production.

The industrial policy that has driven economic expansion in Korea has excluded any input from labour at the national level: until recent democratization, there was no accord comparable to the Wagner Act in the United States that recognized labour's rights to share economically, and to participate politically, in the process of growth. Instead, the Korea Central Intelligence Agency had formal jurisdiction over labour affairs, and high-paid and low-paid workers alike faced the danger of life-threatening repression. On the shop floor, the labour aristocracy has been subjected to harsh and demeaning forms of intimidation.<sup>8</sup> High profits in Korea's mass-production industries have been derived not merely from investments in machinery and modern work methods (what Marx calls 'relative surplus-value extraction' and what the school of regulation calls an 'intensive' regime) but also from the world's longest working week (what Marx calls 'absolute surplus-value extraction' and what the regulationists call an 'extensive'

---

<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that Lipietz explains the recent decline in us productivity by imagining an exhaustion of opportunities to raise productivity in a Taylorized system. See, for example, 'Behind the Crisis: The Exhaustion of a Regime of Accumulation—A "Regulation School" Perspective on Some French Empirical Works', *Review of Radical Political Economics* 18 (1) and (2), Spring and Summer 1986. Yet the same Taylorized technology has proved merely the starting point for raising productivity in East Asia.

<sup>7</sup> For inter-industry wage differences, see A.B. Krueger and L.H. Summers, 'Reflections on the Inter-Industry Wage Structure', Discussion Paper No. 1252, Harvard Institute of Economic Research, Cambridge, Mass., 1989. For gender wage differences in Korea, see J.W. Lee, 'Economic Development and Wage Inequality in South Korea', Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> J.-I. You, 'Capital-Labor Relations of the Newly Industrializing Regime in South Korea: Past, Present, and Future', mimeograph, Department of Economics, Harvard University, 1989.

regime). While Fordist theorists seem to view growth through higher productivity, and growth through harder work, as independent *regimes of accumulation*—characterizing different groups of workers or different time periods—it is the case that in Korea the two forms of profit making operate side by side, and characterize the same group of workers simultaneously.

The overall evidence suggests that Fordism (mass production in the United States) and peripheral Fordism (mass production in the Third World) have entirely different *modes of regulation*. One cannot predict from the global Fordist model, therefore, either which institutions in the Third World are conducive to fast growth, or which Third World countries will grow fast. If the problem of Fordism was underconsumption, then the problem of late industrialization is the creation of international competitiveness. If the state in the era of Henry Ford took a back-seat role to the private entrepreneur, then the state in late industrialization plays the leading part in capital accumulation. If, as Alain Lipietz has argued, the process of de-skilling and procedurizing work is exhausting opportunities to increase productivity in the Fordist system, thereby precipitating the ubiquitous 'crisis', then the very same process of de-skilling and procedurizing of work in Japan and Korea is producing a rate-of-productivity increase that is thoroughly realigning global competition. The Fordist model possesses little predictive power when applied to the Third World, and consequently we are left with no more than empty categorical boxes borrowed from the regulation methodology.

### An Alternative Framework: Industrialization Through Learning

I turn now to an alternative institutional explanation of late industrialization in general and Korean industrialization in particular, returning to the criticisms expressed above. I term those countries that have succeeded in entering more skill-, technology-, and capital-intensive industries 'late' rather than 'newly' industrializing, not in order to add to the clutter of jargon that already plagues the Third World, but because lateness matters to competitiveness, and hence to development, when it is defined in terms of the *absence of novel technology*, even in the leading or dominant firms of a country. The important question is not whether industrializing 'late', as so defined, is easier or harder than industrializing early—a question with which Alexander Gerschenkron was supposedly concerned.<sup>9</sup> Rather, two more important questions are: first, whether there are general properties specific to late industrialization; and second, whether differences in growth rates among late industrializers can be understood in terms of variations in these general properties.

I argue that the general properties of an industrialization process based on learning, or borrowing, technology are entirely different from those of an industrialization process based on the generation of

---

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass. 1962.

new products or processes—the hallmark of the First and Second Industrial Revolutions. Thus, the late acquisition of international competitiveness has given rise to certain common tendencies in otherwise diverse countries—Japan, Korea, Taiwan, India, Turkey, Brazil and Mexico. Further, growth rates among these countries have differed not because markets have been allowed to operate more or less freely, but because the institutions general to late industrialization have functioned with varying degrees of effectiveness.<sup>20</sup>

The problems that late-industrializing countries confront in creating international competitiveness may be appreciated in historical context. Industrialization in eighteenth-century Britain may be said to have occurred on the basis of *invention*. Productivity increases were realized by means of a search—largely through trial and error—for better products and processes, in the context of the small-scale firm under the control and ownership of the individual entrepreneur. Industrialization in the nineteenth century by the dominant enterprises of Germany and the United States may be said to have occurred on the basis of *innovation*, or the mass commercialization of the inventions of individuals, through a process involving systematic problem-solving, increasingly in the context of the R&D laboratory. The modern industrial enterprise replaces the small-scale firm as key institution, and the owner-entrepreneur is eclipsed by the corporate manager. This Second Industrial Revolution, of course, provides the inspiration for Fordism.

While these two modes of industrialization differ, if only in their degree of scientific content and company organization, nevertheless in both cases new technology provided leading firms with a competitive asset. By contrast, the mode of late industrialization has been one of borrowing technology from more technically advanced societies, or what may be called *learning*. Borrowing requires creativity, just as innovation or invention requires learning from others. Historically, leading firms in Germany and the United States learned from those in England, and only then advanced beyond the English with a series of innovations in the fields of chemicals, electricity and energy in the continuous process industries, and electrical equipment, transportation and machinery in the fabrication/assembly sectors. Moreover, while leading German and American innovators were responsible for outcompeting the British, most companies in the United States and Germany were followers.

Nevertheless, the waging of competition by dominant firms without the aid of a novel technology involves a very different struggle from that in which technological advantage plays a key role. The citadel of Fordism provides the example of automobiles: while General Motors

---

<sup>20</sup> Most references are from Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant*. See also A.H. Amsden, *Republic of Korea*, World Institute for Development Economics Research of the United National University, Stabilization and Adjustment Policies and Programmes, Country Study Number 14, Helsinki, Finland 1987 (published in the Korean language by Si-Se-Yong-O-Sa Publishers, Inc., 1989). The argument in Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant*, is summarized in 'Asia's Next Giant: How Korea Competes in the World Economy', *Technology Review*, May/June 1989; and 'Invention, Innovation, and Learning', *Political Economy* 3 (2), 1987.

learned from Ford and the European car manufacturers after the turn of the century, its distinct design technology enabled it to gain a market share from Ford in a manner that later manufacturers like Toyota and Hyundai could only envy. Consequently, inside Toyota and Hyundai a set of institutions evolved, with a set of supporting institutions in the Japanese and Korean economies, which contrast with those characteristic of General Motors and the US automobile industry.

In general, postwar industrialization based on learning, or borrowing foreign technology, is associated with a common set of properties, or shared tendencies. In each case, however—government intervention, conglomerates, shop-floor focus and labour—Japan, Korea and Taiwan excel.

(1) *Getting Relative Prices 'Wrong'*

Government intervention in the process of industrialization has tended to be greater than in the past, both because technology has not constituted a competitive asset and because at international prices the low wage rates of late industrializers have been insufficient to compete against the higher productivity levels of more advanced economies. If the metaphor of the First Industrial Revolution is '*laissez faire*', and that of the Second 'infant industry protection', then that of late industrialization is a category comprehensive enough to overcome the penalties of lateness—call it 'the subsidy'. The subsidy includes not just tariff protection of the home market but also incentives to export, subsidies on inputs, government investment to promote technical or economic linkages among industries, as well as the usual state support of social-overhead and big-business diplomacy. To stimulate investment and trade, the state has used the subsidy to get relative prices deliberately 'wrong'—that is, different from what the forces of supply and demand would determine.

What is mystifying is not the extent of government intervention in the process of late industrialization, including in the East Asian countries, but rather why the state in East Asia has been more effective than most. The state in Korea, Japan and Taiwan has been more effective than other late-industrializing countries because it has had the power to *discipline big business*, and thereby to dispense subsidies to big business according to a more effective set of allocative principles.

(2) *Conglomerates*

In late-industrializing countries mass production has emerged embodied in a distinct institution: the diversified business group. A volume describing the proceedings of the International Conference on Business History testifies to the ubiquity of the diversified business group in the Third World: 'In developing countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, India, Brazil, and Argentina... industrial groups which resemble Japan's former *zaibatsu* have sprung up since the Second World War.'<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Editor's 'Introduction', in S. Yasuoka, ed., *Family Business in the Era of Industrial Growth: Its Ownership and Management*, Tokyo 1984.



The diversified business group is part of a family that Alfred Chandler describes as the modern industrial enterprise. Family members are large-scale, multidivisional and hierarchical.<sup>22</sup> The diversified business group, however, operates in a wider, less related range of industries than is typical of such enterprises, and with a greater degree of central cohesion than that of the American conglomerate. The fact of lateness appears to encourage diversification by *zaibatsu*-like groups into more unrelated industries than the typical modern industrial enterprise, and to foster closer coordination of flows of financial resources and people at the top of the corporate structure. Because leading firms in late-industrializing countries do not have the technical or marketing expertise to expand within a single high-quality market niche, they move instead into the bottom end of many different markets. Because they are able to borrow capital and technology from abroad, they do not have to dilute financial ownership by providing new investors with equity. With one family dominating at the top of the organization, there are close connections among all the various businesses in the group. In fact, central coordination linked to broad diversification may be a unique competitive advantage, or scope economy, of late industrializers, for it allows them to enter new industries quickly and efficiently.

Diversified business groups are a phenomenon general to late industrialization, but they are especially large in Korea, where they are known as *chaebol*. *Fortune's* list of five hundred international, private, non-oil-producing firms in 1986 included ten from Korea and only seven from all the other developing countries combined. The *chaebol* account for a degree of aggregate economic concentration that is staggering even by the standards of American or German business history. According to one estimate, sales of the top ten *chaebol* in 1984 accounted for 67 per cent of Korean GNP.<sup>23</sup> Yet the scope of the *chaebol* has allowed them to attract the best professional managers and has given them the power to penetrate deep into international markets.

### (3) *Strategic Shop-Floor Focus*

Different modes of industrializing, one with and one without original technology, are associated with differences in what may be termed the firm's strategic focus. The corporate office, inclusive of research and development functions, tends to be the strategic focus of companies that compete on the basis of innovation, because it is at the administrative level that new technology is developed and marketed. By contrast, the shop floor tends to be the strategic focus of firms that compete on the basis of making borrowed technology work. Because

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, A. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise*, Cambridge, Mass. 1962; *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, Cambridge, Mass. 1977.

<sup>23</sup> S.K. Kim, 'Business Concentration and Government Policy: A Study of the Phenomenon of Business Groups in Korea, 1945-1985', Ph.D. thesis, Harvard Business School 1987. These figures refer to sales rather than value added, and sales include inputs produced by other firms. However, many suppliers to the big business groups are satellite subcontractors, so the sales figures may not exaggerate aggregate economic concentration.

products similar to those of the company are internationally available, the strategic focus is necessarily to be found where the achievement of incremental, yet cumulative, improvements in productivity and product specification occur, and therefore enhance competitiveness.

Shopfloor management in Korea, as in Japan, has been especially effective. There has been a large supply of engineers, who have kept in close touch with the ranks. Overhead costs have not become prohibitive. Compared with Latin America, there have also been few multinational firms in Korea operating outside the labour-intensive, export-oriented sectors. Korean ownership and control of the 'commanding heights' have been a decided advantage to the extent that Korean management is more quality- and productivity-conscious than that of many multinationals, and lends itself more easily to government control.

#### (4) *Labour*

Cheap labour is the anchor of late industrialization. Labour has been available in 'unlimited' supply, generally politically powerless, and educated to a level unknown in former industrial revolutions. The discipline of labour by the state lies at the heart of all late industrialization. For this reason, such discipline cannot account for differences in growth rates among late-industrializing countries. Even in India, which has tended to grow more slowly than Korea, parliamentary democracy has been conditioned by the caste system and dosed with emergency powers wielded by New Delhi. Mexico's constitutional regime embodies decisive privileges for the ruling party. Therefore, it would be simplistic to argue that growth has been faster in Korea because of more authoritarianism, and slower in India and Mexico because of more democracy. Labour repression is the basis of late industrialization everywhere, though in Korea as in other late industrializers a militant trade unionism contests this. Developmental differences among late industrializers are best explained in terms of the discipline imposed on big business, not labour, as I argue shortly.

Korea has a highly educated workforce, however, and this makes its own contribution to economic progress. In 1903 there were 5 students in British universities or university colleges per ten thousand population, and 7.87 in Germany per ten thousand. In 1985 the comparable figure for Korea was 217.5 students. In 1899 the number of boys in public secondary schools per thousand was only 4.3 in Birmingham and 10 in Berlin. In 1984 the comparable figure for Korea, including both sexes, was 20.<sup>14</sup> The school curriculum for Korea includes a heavy dose of social indoctrination.<sup>15</sup> Doubtless the legacy of traditional social relations as embodied in religion, domestic subordination and agricultural routine has played a part in shaping a labour

---

<sup>14</sup> For Britain and Germany, see P.W. Musgrave, *Technical Change in the Labour Force and Education: A Study of the British and German Iron and Steel Industries 1860-1964*, Oxford 1967.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, H.F. McGinn et al., *Education and Development in Korea*, Cambridge, Mass. 1980.

force that is at once skilled and disciplined, yet the state's educational and training policies have ensured that these disciplines and skills have assumed economically appropriate forms. By comparison with other late-industrializing countries, or even a city-state like Singapore, Korea is at the top of most educational indices, scaled for population size: secondary students as a percentage of eligible secondary-age students; scientists and engineers per capita, and so on. A large number of engineers in Korea compete with each other for the best jobs, thereby driving up productivity.

Most foreign technical assistance has come from Japan, a fact that has given Korea an edge over other late-industrializing countries culturally and geographically further afield. Japan may not until very recently have been as close to the world technological frontier as the United States, nor as generous in transferring proprietary know-how, but it emerged as the world's premier producer, and communicated to Korea both the most efficient production techniques and a seriousness about the manufacturing function. Korea has been a successful learner partly because it has invested heavily in education, both of the formal academic variety and that derived from foreign technical assistance.

To gain a closer picture of the institutional variations of late industrialization in the Korean case we will now focus on the state, shop-floor management and labour (at the cost of saying little specifically about the diversified business group, or *chaebol*). Let us start by addressing the issues raised by the 'global Fordism' thesis, as a preliminary to outlining a more adequate model.

### The State

Beginning in the 1960s, some Third World countries—Korea and Taiwan among them—began exporting manufactures that embodied large amounts of unskilled labour. They had little trouble in gaining a competitive advantage in these goods—wood veneer, wigs, Christmas-tree decorations, plastic toys and so forth—because the amounts of labour embodied in such items is so large that the high productivity levels of advanced countries are no match for low wage rates. For neo-classical economists, economic development on the basis of such exports is taken as a confirmation of the theory of comparative advantage. For global Fordists, economic development on the basis of such exports is attributed to capitalist 'crisis' and global restructuring. The terminology is different, but the emphasis on a new international division of labour as an explanation of economic development is quite similar.

Foreign demand for ultra-labour-intensive goods from any single low-wage country is limited, however, because total world demand tends to be spread over many Third World regions. The location of direct foreign investment to produce the most labour-intensive manufactures in any single low-wage country is also limited. Consequently, it becomes problematic for any one Third World country to count on such manufactured exports to provide a powerful enough engine of

growth, save maybe small city-states such as Hong Kong and Singapore. By the same token, it is inappropriate to rely on the concept of 'global restructuring' to supply a theory for Third World industrialization. In Taiwan, which was among the most successful of Third World countries in attracting foreign investment, foreign firms on average accounted for no more than 5.5 per cent of capital formation between 1962 and 1975. Of this total, less than one-fifth was involved in export platform activity. Monthly employment in Mexico's *maquiladoras* averaged 307,866 in 1987. Although this represents a big jump from a monthly average of 119,546 in 1980, it is still trivial compared with Mexico's economically active population, which in 1987 stood at approximately 25 million.<sup>66</sup> Foreign investment in the *maquiladoras* occupies centre stage in analyses of the international division of labour, which is widely regarded as the spur to economic development. In reality, labour-intensive export activity by multinational firms has usually been too modest in any one developing country to serve as the basis for extensive growth.

Cheap labour has not sufficed to sustain 'comparative advantage' in any other than the most labour-intensive branches. It does not explain the success of cotton spinning and weaving, the leading sector in the 1960s in Korea, Taiwan, and other late-industrializing countries. The evidence suggests that at world prices, or after repeated devalued exchange rates, low wages were an insufficient condition for these countries to gain international competitiveness. The governments of Korea and Taiwan had to intervene to subsidize the production even of cotton textiles—a relatively labour-intensive good—until either productivity at home or the wages of foreign competitors rose enough to make subsidies redundant.

Japan is a late-industrializing country by virtue of the fact that initially even its dominant firms had no novel technology with which to enter world markets. Yet Japan is marked off from other such countries by the behaviour of its leading sector. When its cotton spinners and weavers began to take a market share away from Lancashire after the turn of the century, they did so not merely by dint of lower wages, but through the deployment of competitive assets. They instituted centralized control over output to check overproduction, and large, integrated manufacturing units equipped with the most modern technology; they benefited from shipping subsidies and low shipping costs; and, finally, they showed great efficiency in marketing the finished product, resulting from the maintenance of closer contacts with customers and intimate cooperation between the manufacturing and mercantile sections of the industry.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, when cotton spinners and weavers from Korea and Taiwan entered world markets in the 1960s, the only competitive asset they had was their low wage

<sup>66</sup> For Taiwan, see T.-C. Chou, 'The Evolution of Market Structure in Taiwan', *Revista Internazionale di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali* 35 (2), 1988; and C. Schive, 'Direct Foreign Investment, Technology Transfer and Linkage Effects: A Case Study of Taiwan', Ph.D. thesis, Case Western Reserve 1978. For Mexico, see Anibal Yanex, mimeograph, University of California at Berkeley 1988.

<sup>67</sup> G.E. Hubbard, *Eastern Industrialization and Its Effects on the West*, Oxford 1938, p. 81.

rates. These, however, proved inadequate to compete against the higher productivity levels of Japan. According to one account, labour costs in the cotton-textile industry of Japan, Korea and Taiwan were running neck and neck in the 1960s, and if other costs were taken into account, Japan would undoubtedly have had the edge.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the governments of Korea and Taiwan stepped in with a package of subsidies that became a model for subsequent industrial growth, not least in the mass-production sectors.

### Disciplining Big Businesses

In the First Industrial Revolution, competition among a large number of small firms (the 'invisible hand') acted as a disciplinary mechanism. With the subsequent erosion of competitive market structures, Joseph Schumpeter analysed a new basis for competition, a new mechanism to discipline company behaviour in the age of Fordism. He recognized technological change as itself a disciplining factor: the creative gales of new technological discoveries uprooted old monopolies and increased productivity, in uneven spurts. Late industrialization, however, is characterized neither by a large number of small firms nor by innovation. There is no automatic mechanism in it to drive firms to be productive because growth itself does not happen automatically. Growth is dependent on the subsidy, yet subsidies to business invite the abuses of gross resource misallocation and corruption.

Korea largely avoided the paralysing venality and inefficiency associated with subsidies and protection. Take automobiles for example. For twenty-five years no foreign cars were to be seen on Korean roads, and no Korean cars were to be seen on foreign roads. Yet Hyundai Motors, Korea's most successful car manufacturer and part of one of its largest *chaebol*, is a well-managed firm. So are thirty other big Korean companies that I have studied. The performance of Korea's big businesses cannot be measured by profitability, because profit data are manipulated; nor can it be measured by volume of exports, which may merely reflect subsidization. Good performance must be measured by physical indicators of production and operations management—say, productivity, quality and inventories, as well as changes in export values. By these indicators, Korea's big businesses have generally been exceptionally well-managed, notwithstanding the fact that every one of them has prospered through political favour.

The Hyundai Motor Company, soon after its founding, established a Design Centre to begin reducing its reliance on foreign design inputs. Eventually, all small parts were designed in-house and HMC established a Parts Development Department to upgrade the technological capability of its parts subcontractors. A Machine Tool Division, founded in 1978, makes 25 per cent of the materials-handling equipment used on HMC's assembly and transfer lines. The remarks of one manager help to convey HMC's proactive approach to raising

---

<sup>18</sup> K.D. Woo, 'Wages and Labor Productivity in the Cotton Spinning Industries of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan', *Developing Economies*, 16, 1978.

productivity: 'Many small robots are made by the workers. There are small study groups of workers on each line. All have long experience at each station. There is also a big Quality Department. There is someone from the Quality Department at all major workstations, who will work together with the workers. HMC is trying to build a good quality circle movement. It cannot yet do as well as the Japanese and sometimes... workers have to call on the Methods Engineering Department... The plant manager likes to do job rotation for learning purposes. Rejected cars become workers' teachers. HMC has introduced a new computerized system that allows a particular part to be traced right back to the worker responsible, or to the supplier.'<sup>9</sup>

No matter how well-connected they are politically, all subsidy recipients in Korea have been subject to four blanket controls imposed by the government. First, all firms have had to export sooner or later, in larger or smaller quantities. Minimal export targets have been set even for unpromising industries such as papermaking, for example, whose future is lustreless in a country, like Korea, with no timber resources. Exports have provided the Korean government with a transparent measure of the progress of those in receipt of subsidy. This has been one of their most important functions, more important in many industries than volume. Second, all commercial banks were until recently owned by the government, and all financial institutions continue to operate under government control. This has discouraged speculation on the part of the recipients of cheap credit. Third, discipline has been imposed on 'market-dominating enterprises' through annually negotiated price controls, in the name of curbing monopoly power. At the end of 1986, the prices of as many as 110 commodities were controlled, including flour, sugar, coffee, red pepper, electricity, gas, steel, chemicals, synthetic fibres, paper, drugs, nylon stocking, automobiles and televisions. Fourth, investors have been subject to controls on capital flight, or the remittance of liquid capital overseas. Legislation passed in the 1960s stipulated that any illegal overseas transfer of \$1 million or more was punishable with a minimum sentence of ten years' imprisonment and a maximum sentence of death.

No firm in South Korea could succeed if it openly criticized the government. No firm could flourish if it was not a staunch government supporter. Nevertheless, despite pervasive corruption surrounding the allocation of subsidies to specific companies, discipline has still been effective: generally only good performers have been rewarded and poor performers have been punished. On numerous occasions the government, in its role as banker, has not only refused to bail out poorly managed firms in otherwise healthy industries, but has transferred the assets of such firms to other enterprises (invariably political allies, but better-managed ones).

In short, subsidies in Korea (as in Japan and Taiwan) have been allocated to big business according to the principle of reciprocity, in exchange for performance standards, whereas in other late-industrializing countries subsidies have tended to be dispensed as giveaways, in what amounts to a free-for-all. Subsidized firms in Korea have received

---

<sup>9</sup> Amsden *Asia's Next Giant*, pp. 176-79.

cheap capital (often at negative real interest rates, the ultimate 'wrong' relative price), but they have had to produce, not speculate. They have been allowed to sell in a protected home market, but they have had to raise productivity and quality to increase their share of foreign markets. They have been allowed to import foreign technology, but they have had to begin investing in their own R&D. They have been allowed to exploit Korean labour, but they have had to train it and, in the case of the big companies, retain it through economic slumps.

South Korea has enjoyed one of the highest productivity growth rates in the world.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence, it has been possible for the government to grant big business lower subsidies and less protection than in other countries. An astonishing fact about Korea's foray into the mass-production industries in the 1970s is that the burden of debt remained constant (as measured by the debt/GNP ratio) despite a heavy reliance on foreign loans. As indicated in Table 1, whereas the absolute value of debt increased from \$3,589 million in 1972 to \$20,500 million in 1979, total debt as a percentage of GNP *declined* slightly as a consequence of a large volume of production, from roughly 34 per cent in 1972 to 32 per cent in 1979, just before the second energy crisis.

Table 1. External Debt and Debt Service

Year	Total Foreign Debt (millions US\$)	Long-Term Debt as % of Total	Total Debt as % of GNP
1965	206	98.54	6.81
1972	3,589	82.17	33.95
1979	20,500	67.80	31.75
1984	43,100	73.55	53.16

Sources: A.H. Amaden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*, Oxford 1989.

Until recent democratizations, South Korea was an unambiguously authoritarian society. Yet if democracy means power by the people over their lives, then the antithesis of democracy is the power of business to decide if and when to invest. To the extent that the Korean government has disciplined business and has not allowed it to hold society to ransom with its investment decisions, Korea has exacted a measure of public accountability greater than that of many other late-, and even early-, industrializing countries.

### The State and Developmentalism

Any analysis of late industrialization must have at its core a theory of economic development—which, in this case, is getting relative prices 'wrong'—in conjunction with a theory of the state. It is not adequate merely to maintain that the state 'induces' investment and is

<sup>20</sup> H. Chenery, S. Robinson, and M. Syrquin, *Industrialization and Growth: A Comparative Study*, New York 1986.

'autonomous'. All governments know that subsidies are most effective when they are based on performance standards. Nevertheless, state power to impose such standards, and bureaucratic capability to implement them, vary from country to country.

The Korean state was traditionally weak, but in the 1960s the military regime of Park Chung Hee succeeded in consolidating its power over finance, commerce, industry and agriculture. Financiers were weak because the banking system was nationalized, first under Japanese colonial rule and then under President Park. Merchants were attracted into manufacturing with subsidies, and discouraged from importing by acute foreign-exchange shortages; thus mercantile interests were not capable of challenging the military government's authority. Because industry evolved in a government-subsidized hothouse, corporations did not have a history of independent existence—as they did, say, in Turkey and India—or the independent identity that came with it.

Perhaps most importantly, in the late 1940s Korea (and Japan and Taiwan) underwent a land reform. It was prompted by US occupying forces as a way to deter the spread of Communism.<sup>21</sup> Land reform created a system of small landowners who never had the power to compromise state authority. The coffee estates of Brazil, say, have no political equal in Korea. It is no coincidence that the three most successful late industrializers, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, all experienced land reforms after World War II which were critical in buttressing state power.

The transformation of the state in Korea and Taiwan from speculative rent seeker to promoter of capital accumulation was gradual. Developmentalism on the part of the military regimes of Park Chung Hee and Chiang Kai-Shek evolved pragmatically, in the course of economic development. As developmentalism evolved, the objective of the state also shifted: from overcoming the problems of underconsumption to creating economic viability based on higher productivity.

In the early 1960s, export subsidies were arranged by the Korean government for cotton spinners and weavers because production capacity outstripped domestic demand. This fact is in keeping with the Regulation School view that the process of economic development is one wherein institutions evolve to overcome the problem of underconsumption. Korean cotton-textile manufacturers were suffering from excess capacity in this period because they had taken advantage of subsidized American aid-related investment loans to labour-intensive industries in the 1950s. Nevertheless, the government's policy on exports shifted quickly from one of creating demand to one of delivering Korea from dependence on US financial support. This is ironic because currently Korea's high export exposure is regarded in the opposite light: as deepening dependence. In the mid 1960s, exports were viewed by the government as a redemption from reliance on American aid.

---

<sup>21</sup> See the discussion in Bruce Cumings, 'The Abortive Abertura: South Korea in the Light of Latin American Experience', *NLR* 173, January–February 1989.



As both subsidies, and hence exports, increased further, the official policy on exports changed again, from one of increasing self-reliance to one of providing an overall growth strategy. The focus was now the raising of productivity and competitiveness. In his New Year's message for 1968, Park Chung Hee stated: 'In order to realize the target of more than \$1 billion in exports, we must, on the one hand, improve our management skills and replace old industrial equipment with new as soon as possible, and on the other, rearrange the nation's productive system in preparation for "mass production".'<sup>23</sup> In preparation for mass production, he asked industrialists to think afresh, in terms of creating new markets through higher productivity rather than guarding old markets through protection: 'I sincerely ask industrialists to discard their habit of relying on protection as if they were plants in a hothouse, and to make an assiduous effort to explore new markets, improve the quality of their products, rationalize management, and effect technical renovation.'<sup>23</sup> The government had come a long way in a short time, from its early attempts to raise demand for cotton-textiles producers, to its later attempts to increase overall supply and the productivity of manufacturers.

As exports increased, the government became more convinced of the prospects for growth, and committed more resources to economic development. As more resources were committed, growth further increased. It can be said, therefore, that the state was transformed from speculator to investor in the course of economic development, just as the state transformed the course of economic development itself.<sup>24</sup> The concept of 'autonomy' is insufficient to capture either of these transformations.

Before proceeding to the micro level of analysis, it is worth emphasizing that the East Asian model is far from ideal. Labour is repressed, women in particular are exploited, business and government are in league, and pollution is extreme. Nevertheless, out of that process of industrialization have emerged popular movements for democracy. More to the point, that process is the only one that has achieved industrialization in the underdeveloped world.

### Raising Productivity

The process of raising productivity in both Korea and Japan has differed from that employed in advanced countries, despite the use of mass-production technology almost identical to that of European and American plants, and an accompanying (possibly more intensive) de-skilling and procedurization of work practices. Companies that borrow technology tend to have a strategic focus on the shop floor, whereas companies that create technology tend to have a strategic focus on the design office. Additionally, the process of raising

<sup>23</sup> S.B. Shik (comp.), *Major Speeches by Korea's Park Chung Hee*, Seoul 1970, p. 147.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 126, 129.

<sup>24</sup> The same process occurred in Taiwan. See A.H. Arnsden, 'The State and Taiwan's Economic Development', in P.B. Evans, D. Rueschmeyer, and T. Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge 1985.

productivity in late-industrializing countries has differed from that of classical Fordism with respect to the conditions of labour. In both cases workers in heavy mass-production industries are better-paid than workers in other industries. Here, however, the similarity ends, because management in these industries in the United States have treated high wages as in themselves sufficient to motivate labour and ensure high productivity. By contrast, managers in Korea and Japan have regarded relatively high wages in the mass-production sectors as merely the starting point for extracting higher productivity from workers.<sup>25</sup> Other methods of extraction have included the involvement of labour in shop-floor problem-solving, usually in the context of quality-control circles, and the successful repression of any labour organization or labour practices hostile to higher productivity—that is, industrial unions and their associated work rules. If these differences appear minor, it should be remembered that they are partly responsible for a major shift in global competitiveness, from early- to late-industrializing countries, since the Second World War.

To overcome technical ignorance, the *chaebol* that were to dominate the mass-production industries in Korea relied heavily on foreign technical assistance, often packaged initially as a turnkey transfer. A shop-floor focus started with the attempt to unpackage technology transfer and ultimately dispense altogether with foreign technical assistance. In the case of POSCO, Korea's state-owned integrated iron and steel company, the best managers were assigned to work with foreign technical assistants long before production began. Each facility within the huge steel-mill had a foreign expert and a Korean assigned to it, so that when construction was finished and operating procedures had been established, the Korean possessed familiarity with all aspects of the plant and could manage it independently. To operate the mill efficiently, the best managers were assigned to the line. Even shift supervisors were experienced people with college degrees. Additionally, POSCO emphasized on-the-job operations training for all its technical managers. Newly recruited managers with university backgrounds were required to work on all three shifts in order to become familiar with every operation. On-the-job training in steel-making lasted for six months; in iron-making it lasted for one year. The staff of the quality-control department had to work in the plant for at least three months.

### Participatory Organization

The protagonist of industrialization in successive historical epochs has shifted from the owner-entrepreneur, to the corporate manager, to the production engineer, because the latter is the only person with the technical knowledge to make imported technology work. An emphasis on hiring engineers rather than general managers is characteristic of all Korean industry. As Table 2 indicates, between 1960 and 1980 the employment of general managers increased only twofold, whereas the employment of engineers rose by a multiple of roughly ten (although it started from a lower base).

---

<sup>25</sup> Amaden, *Asia's Next Giant*, p. 281.

**Table 2. Managerial Resources in Korea's Manufacturing Sector by Category, 1960-1980**

Employment Category	1960	1970	1980	Increase 1980/1960
Engineers	4,425	116,252	44,999	10.2
Managers	31,350	47,166	69,585	2.2
Sales	50,025	27,778	68,716	13.7
Service	13,660	22,740	49,522	3.6
Clerical	17,330	143,849	356,362	20.6
Production	404,735	1,188,406	2,206,851	5.4
Total	479,975	1,447,520	2,797,030	5.8
Administration*/ Production (ratio)	0.13	0.10	0.10	—
Administration and Clerical/ Production (ratio)	0.18	0.22	0.27	—

*Note:* Includes transportation and communication workers in the manufacturing sector.

\* 'Administration' includes engineers, managers, sales and service workers but excludes clerical workers.

*Sources:* see Table 1.

To raise productivity, Korean companies computerized process controls and materials planning, tightened cost accounting, experimented with management information systems, and proceduralized work. In mass-production industries such as shipbuilding, where the process is largely embodied in people, companies emphasized time and motion studies. The Production Engineering Department at Hyundai Heavy Industries, Korea's largest shipbuilder, modelled work organization along the lines of Japanese rather than European shipyards. Although both had provided HHI with technical assistance, in European practice skilled workers wielded greater discretion over their job content and methods. Because Korean shipyards, like Japanese shipyards before them, were, during their early years of operation, short of experienced skilled workers, the Japanese practice of centralized definition of job content and method was followed instead. By mid 1986 labour requirements per representative vessel in HHI were almost half what they had been six years earlier, and bulk material usage was reduced by more than 25 per cent.

In industries like steel-making, where the process is largely embodied in equipment rather than people, time and motion studies were less emphasized. To raise productivity of both labour and capital, POSCO attempted to stabilize operations, minimize downtime (through preventive maintenance of equipment), improve the performance of each piece of equipment (through better worker training) and reduce

rejects (through tighter process control). An ironic indicator of the speed of POSCO's progress was a joint venture it entered into with United States Steel (USX) in 1986 for the purpose of modernizing USX's plant in Pittsburg, California. At that time, POSCO was supplying half of the capital requirements, or \$180 million, for the modernization: providing the PittCal cold-rolled sheet facility with hot-bend coil, undertaking basic design of the facility's modernization jointly with USX, and training American managers and workers in operations and maintenance.

In some Korean companies, quality circles arose not as foreign implants but spontaneously, often as part of attempts to improve productivity generally. Spontaneity is suggested by the first manager of HHI's Department of Quality Control (QC) for shipbuilding: 'I tried to develop feedback between production departments and QC. At first workers didn't work very hard. But soon people became very busy. Every morning, production people would use the microphone to address the workers, urging them to work harder. I noticed variations in quality across different production sections, so I called a joint meeting in order to compare performance. Then I called two meetings in which I presented a monthly evaluation of quality differences. At the fourth meeting, I made section chiefs undertake their own monthly evaluations and then compete against each other . . . When I visited Seoul in 1975, I heard about quality control circles and was surprised to learn that the kind of activity that I had started at HHI was going on outside.'<sup>26</sup>

What helped participatory organization to evolve in Korea was the fact that the management structure of the average large-scale firm is relatively compact—a general feature of Korean management and its strategic shop-floor focus. Firms with 5,000 employees or more have fewer levels of hierarchy than firms with 200 to 300 employees (although they have a greater number of departments and sections than do smaller firms, and a large number of subordinates per section chief).<sup>27</sup> The compactness of the hierarchical structure suggests that engineers who have entered the manufacturing sector in increasing numbers in Korea since 1960 have kept in relatively close touch with the ranks.

The behaviour of overhead costs in Korea reflects a strategic focus on the shopfloor and a Spartan regard for staff functions. Table 2 indicates that between 1960 and 1980 there was a sharp increase in the number of white-collar workers. Nevertheless, excluding the clerical category, the ratio of white-collar to blue-collar or production workers *declined* from 0.13 in 1960 to 0.10 in 1980. This is a rather surprising fact in the light of the steady increase in this ratio in the USA and

---

<sup>26</sup> For a jaundiced view of Japanese ('post-Fordist') work methods, see John Foster and Charles Woolfson, 'Corporate Reconstruction and Business Unionism: the Lessons of Caterpillar and Ford', *MIL* 174, March–April 1989.

<sup>27</sup> Seoul National University, College of Business Administration, *The Current Situation and Tasks to Be Done by Korean Firms* [in Korean], Seoul, College of Business Administration, Seoul National University, 1985.

Europe, beginning with the introduction of top-down management and the onset of Fordism at the turn of the century.<sup>28</sup>

### Wages and Working Conditions

Industrializing by the gun does not promote high rates of productivity growth or quality on the shop floor. At minimum, workers have to be motivated to work efficiently because all their efforts cannot be policed. In capitalist societies, the rate of pay lies at the heart of worker motivation. Until the recent democratizations, rates of pay in Korea were determined in a milieu of 'unlimited labour supply' and authoritarian repression of labour's demands, both inside and outside the firm. Given the expectation in underconsumptionist theory for the forces of supply of goods and services to outstrip those of demand, the sustained growth of late-industrializing countries oriented towards producing for the home market—say, India or Brazil—ought to reflect the resolution of institutional conflict in favour of rising mass incomes, and thereby to provide the effective demand for the output of mass production. By contrast, the export orientation of fast-growing Korea and Taiwan would lead an underconsumptionist to suppose that institutional conflict was somehow resolved in favour of stagnant mass incomes, in the interests of sustaining international competitiveness. In fact, the growth rate of average real wages has been far higher in Korea and Taiwan than in Brazil and India, because productivity growth has been higher.<sup>29</sup> Wage data tend to be subject to a wide margin of error, but the differences in growth rates indicated in Table 3 are of an order of increasing magnitude, particularly in Korea. Between 1970 and 1980, for example, the index of real non-agricultural wages rose from 100 to 227 in Korea and only from 100 to 130 in Brazil. Reality, therefore, is diametrically opposite to the expectations of the underconsumptionist view. Moreover, salience of the 'cash nexus' component in worker compensation in Korea helps to keep in proportion those cultural factors like Confucianism or nationalism beloved of non-materialist schools of historical or economic analysis.

Korea's wage has exceeded that found in earlier industrial revolutions, including that of Japan. The real earnings of British workers are estimated to have risen by 150 per cent between 1781 and 1851, but Korean manufacturing workers achieved a comparable gain in about twenty years (from 1955 to 1976). Real wages increased in the United States in the fifty-year period between 1865 and 1913 by a factor of almost three. In Korea, real wages quadrupled in half as much time. In Japan, real wages rose by a factor of 2.7 in eighteen years, from approximately 400 yen in 1950 to about 1200 yen in 1968. In Korea they rose by more, by a scalar of 4.3 between 1955 and 1980, and 3.6

---

<sup>28</sup> S. Melman, 'The Rise of Administrative Overheads in the Manufacturing Industries in the United States, 1899-1947', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 12, 3, 1951.

<sup>29</sup> Chenery et al., 1986.

<sup>30</sup> For British data, see P. Lindert and J.G. Williamson, 'English Workers' Living Standards during the Industrial Revolution: A New Look', *Economic History Review*, 36, 1983; for data on the United States, see E.H. Phelps-Brown, *Century of Pay*, London 1986; for data on Japan, see R. Minami, *The Turning Point in Economic Development: Japan's Experience*, Economic Research Series No. 14, Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo.

between 1966 and 1980.<sup>30</sup> Unexpectedly, the wages of production workers in Korea have also risen faster than those of managers and engineers. The average wages of women workers, however, have lagged far behind those of men, enabling employers in the labour-intensive industries to remain internationally competitive alongside the growth of a mass-production sector. Wage discrimination against women in Korea and Japan is the worst in the world; in this area traditional patriarchal forms have, so far, been successfully adapted to modern capitalism.

Table 3. Real Nonagricultural Wage Increases in Seven Late-Industrializing Countries

Year	Korea <sup>a</sup>	Brazil <sup>b</sup>	Argentina	Mexico	Turkey	India <sup>c</sup>	Taiwan
1970	100	100	100	100	100	100	—
1973	119	119	107	104	98	106	107
1976	134	129	80	123	122	120	126
1979	238	134	87	121	135	130	163
1982	241	115	79	117	129	—	180
1984	276	84	112	83	111	—	191

Note: Base = 100. Deflated by consumer price index.

<sup>a</sup> Real earnings in the manufacturing sector.

<sup>b</sup> Average wages for skilled workers in construction. Data are from the Central Bank.

<sup>c</sup> Rupees per hour for industrial workers.

Source: See Table 1.

Wages appear to have risen in Korea partly for reasons related to efficiency. POSCO, for example, has approximately 450 job categories, and the largest number of workers can be found at data-collection stations positioned at well-defined set points in the process. Workers check sensors for temperatures in different process zones, note the chemical composition of gases, and register flow rates. For this they must have a fairly good understanding of the physical and chemical processes involved in iron-making and steel-making, in order to ensure a high quality product, since steel production is not all in closed-loop control, and the acceptable limits of materials change. Workers have had to be paid relatively well to enable them to think clearly in the presence of variability in the production process, particularly toward the end of of an excruciatingly long working week. Production workers in POSCO average a 56-hour week with only one day off *per month* (or an eight-hour day, seven days a week).

Wages also rose in Korea prior to democratization in response to fears of labour unrest, and pressure from the government for wealth sharing on the part of big business. Before democratization, wage increases may have been high but they almost never exceeded the growth rate of productivity. Certainly the government encouraged a narrowing in the wage gap between production workers and managers. Flaunting of wealth has also been discouraged. At one time the

government banned colour television sets from the home market in the belief that they would widen social differences, and the purchase and use of automobiles has been heavily taxed.

High wage increases appear to have had the independent effect of raising long-term productivity. In the 1970s, for example, most big firms saw the writing on the wall and began to invest more in technological capability, aware that the days were numbered in which they could compete on the basis of low wages. When the government began sweetening the incentives to investment in R&D, big business began responding like clockwork to form centralized research laboratories.

In short, in both early and late industrialization, capital-labour relations influence accumulation, and the regime of accumulation influences capital-labour relations. Similar regimes of mass production in early- and late-industrializers, however, have been associated with strikingly different capital-labour relations, throwing into doubt the existence of a 'global Fordist' model.

As noted earlier, Alain Lipietz begins his study of global Fordism by rejecting any attempt at the concrete analysis of the world's 150 countries with their irreducible differences.<sup>31</sup> Although it is not necessary to study all 150, an effort should be made to study *some* in detail before constructing any model. Otherwise, there will be a tendency to interpret Third World industry as a diffusion of advanced-country industry. Also, the existence of qualitative differences between the two will be missed. Late industrialization, as I have suggested above, is a new paradigm, in terms of the operation of the market mechanism and the role of the state. It is not merely an extension of advanced-country capitalism. The failure to perceive this fact has created a crisis in Western intellectual understanding of Pacific dynamism. There has been, moreover, a great flowering of scholarly research on Third World development that does not take the advanced countries as its point of departure, although external forces are factored in. In the fields of economic and social history, there has emerged in the last twenty-five years a Latin American and Indian literature, for example, that is striking for its insights and depth. Those who hope to understand economic development should not imagine that Fordist labels and speculations can be any substitute for the empirical research and conceptual wisdom embodied in these varied attempts to grasp the real dynamic of particular capitalist social formations.

---

<sup>31</sup> Lipietz, pp. 4-5.

## **The Case for Socialism**

by Paul Foot

At last there is a real chance of getting rid of the Tories—but what is the alternative? A Labour Party whose flag is the palest pink? Or a socialism decisively rejected by the workers of Eastern Europe? Was either ever socialist? This book rejects this 'socialism from above' and looks at the revolutionary alternative to a failing capitalism, East and West.

£2.50 / US\$4.00

## **Trotsky: The sword of the revolution 1917-23**

by Tony Cliff

The second volume of Cliff's biography takes Trotsky from 1917, the eve of workers' power, to 1923, the eve of Stalin's power. Why did Trotsky not fulfill his agreement with the ailing Lenin and start an immediate political offensive against the growing bureaucracy and against Stalin? £6.95 / US\$11.95

## **The Politics of James Connolly**

by Kieran Allen

The Marxist James Connolly was an enigma: his greatest writings were a direct challenge to the nationalists in whose company, in 1916, he was to fight and die. This book is a revolutionary socialist analysis of the contradictions in Connolly's strategy for Irish freedom. £5.00 / US\$8.50

*(Special edition available only through the Bookmarx Club—phone us for the current list).*

## **International Socialism 2:47**

The Summer 1990 issue includes Ahmed Shawki on Black Liberation and Socialism in the US, John Rees on Trotsky's contribution to the Marxist method, Chris Harman on the Fourth International, Steve Wright on Hal Draper and Paul Vernel on Postmodernism. £2.50 / US\$4.00

All titles are available from good bookshops; also by mail order (please add 60p / \$1.00 per title for postage) from:

### **Bookmarks London**

265 Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 2DE, England. Phone 01-802 6145.

### **Bookmarks Chicago**

PO Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616, USA. Phone 312-666-7337.



**NEW  
TITLES  
Summer  
1990**



## *Reflections on the Nicaraguan Election*

Following the defeat of the FSLN in the Nicaraguan elections of February 1990, the state of that country's politics remains unclear and unpredictable. Although there can be no doubt that Violeta Chamorro's victory represents a major setback not only for the Sandinistas but also for the Latin American Left as a whole, it would be wrong to depict it as a categorical defeat of the Nicaraguan revolution. The revolution may indeed be over in many senses, but the FSLN's loss of governmental office has to be weighed against the fact that this was incurred through a fair poll freely convoked by the Sandinistas, whose vote massively outstripped that of any other single party. Equally, the FSLN remained undefeated on the military front, and in the immediate aftermath of Chamorro's inauguration it was able to secure the effective integrity of the armed forces that had defended the revolutionary state for over a decade. These two factors alone possess a historical singularity, and underline the need for caution in assessing a situation that is as fluid and confusing in its detail as it is difficult to place in comparative context. Nonetheless,

it is possible to make some broad observations as a first step beyond the tributes and expressions of resolution that immediately followed the election.

The poll of 25 February 1990 produced one simple, indisputable result: the opposition UNO alliance led by Voileta Chamorro won 55 per cent of the ballot against 41 per cent for the FSLN. Although the Sandinistas' share of the vote came close to that which had provided a 'landslide victory' for the British Conservatives, it was far lower than anticipated by most participants and observers, increasing the sense in which the election had not just produced a change in government but delivered a historic political defeat. The reaction abroad (considered below) sharpened this image, and it may well prove to be the case that the election has greater consequence beyond Nicaragua's frontiers than within them. In all events, the predictable projection of the matter as absolutely decisive is in need of quite substantial qualification. This is especially so since it forms part of a global political scenario in which what is seen to be is as contagious as what is. Moreover, not all of those affected are court appointees of whose findings it is sufficient to ask '*cui bono?*'. In such a mood it is, more than usual, necessary to insist upon respect for matters small as well as great, and to challenge those who would see this as nothing more than a stratagem to alleviate distress. A little scrutiny of the case of Nicaragua produces a very mixed picture, but it is assuredly not one that damns the Left to extracting virtues from necessities.

### The Result: Shock at the Obvious

To ask why the result of the election was such a surprise is to pose a question that extends well beyond the immediate circumstances of the poll, although these were undoubtedly important. The key factor here is less the fact that the FSLN was confronted by truly formidable forces—this was widely recognized prior to the election and lay at the heart of subsequent explanations of its results by Sandinista supporters—than the overestimation of the Party's capacity to resist these forces. Whilst such an attitude on the part of sympathizers may be understood in good measure by the depth of their commitment, it would seem that the FSLN leaders themselves shared this belief well beyond the allowable limits of political conviction. After all, they studiously eschewed a short-term reflation of the economy prior to the campaign—a decision that would seem to reflect their confidence far more accurately than the necessary presumption of success once they got on the stump.

In November 1984, the FSLN had gained a very comfortable victory with 66 per cent of the vote in a poll that Washington chose first to denigrate and then to ignore, but which was widely judged to be fair in itself and a reasonably accurate reflection of popular sympathy. Although this success was assisted by the last-minute withdrawal of the leading opposition candidate, Arturo Cruz, its root cause lay in the extensive sympathy and authority enjoyed by the Frente because of its leadership in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship, the barbarism of which was keenly remembered. The FSLN justifiably received

electoral ratification of its revolutionary valour and promise, notwithstanding a rapidly sharpening economic recession, two years of escalating counter-revolutionary activity, and the invasion of Grenada—the latter seeming to presage a major US offensive to follow the widely anticipated re-election of Ronald Reagan a few days after the Nicaraguan poll.

Conditions in 1984, then, were decidedly tough, but those in 1990 were incomparably worse. In May 1985 the USA had imposed an economic boycott, and this, combined with a world recession and discrete but important government mismanagement, had plunged the country into a catastrophic state of hyperinflation, shortages, indebtedness and general disorganization. Confronted with a situation that threatened the survival of the revolution, the FSLN first halted most of the social programmes that had been implemented in the early years of the revolution and lay behind much of the support won in 1984. Then, in February 1988, it introduced an economic stabilization plan that was very close in nature to those prescribed by the IMF. Over the next eighteen months inflation was indeed reduced significantly but at an extraordinarily high cost. In 1988 GDP fell by nearly 10 per cent, and government revenue by 60 per cent. Subsidies were scythed back as average wages fell to the levels of the 1950s. At least 50,000 public employees lost their jobs. At the same time, counter-revolutionary violence had caused direct damage estimated at \$1 billion whilst its indirect economic cost was assessed at \$3 billion. Aside from this, of course, it had led to the loss of some 30,000 lives and the introduction of military conscription, causing palpable discontent amongst that rising portion of the populace that respected the Sandinistas but did not owe them strong allegiance. Furthermore, although the FSLN had from early 1986 bowed to peasant pressure and accelerated the distribution of lands to individual small farmers, the passage of time alone had dimmed much of the revolution's original lustre and shifted popular hopes from change to consolidation.

Despite this profoundly adverse scenario, there was broad expectation that the FSLN should readily gain at least 50 per cent of the vote. When this did not occur, the Sandinistas' shortfall was persuasively explained in terms of a 'tactical vote' by a significant sector of the electorate which perceived UNO as having a better chance of fulfilling the FSLN campaign slogan of 'Everything Will Be Better' than did the Sandinistas themselves. This perception owed much—if not everything—to the fact that UNO was backed by the USA, and only the USA was able to lift the economic embargo, end the war and provide aid. In short, the difference between the real and the expected Sandinista result was the product of an instrumentalist vote that reflected overbearing need before innate sympathy. Understood in such terms, it could be described as 'tactical' and far more the result of North American aggression than of the merits of UNO's campaign or of the FSLN's shortcomings.

### The Politics of National Radicalism

Few would dispute the strength of this analysis, but it still leaves open a number of questions, not least that of surprise at the scale of the

UNO vote. Here, there are several factors of varying importance that deserve more attention than they have understandably received in the immediate wake of the election. First, and least consequential, was the influence of the opinion polls, which were, with rare and barely honourable exceptions, spectacularly inaccurate (as has been the case in almost every recent Latin American election except that in Chile). The fact that almost all the polls showed a significant Sandinista majority provided FSLN supporters with a plausible argument that a good part of an inexperienced electorate only took a disagreeable decision at the last possible moment. Equally, of course, one must allow for sheer technical ineptitude by pollsters, at sea in a country bereft of electoral tradition and psephological skills. Furthermore, it would be foolish to discount completely opposition assertions that the conditions of the campaign made it more difficult to express support for UNO than for the official party.

Of greater substance is the failure, in my view, of the FSLN leadership to comprehend the gravity of the problem facing it. Here I should stress that I am not privy to inside information, and neither was I in Nicaragua during the campaign. Moreover, I believe that the FSLN had fully accepted the consequences of adopting the core features of a liberal-democratic system at least in 1986 and probably in 1984. It follows, then, that the Party would only have countenanced a cancellation of the poll in the most extreme circumstances, which were effectively removed by the Iran-Contra scandal and the Arias regional peace plan of 1987. If this is so, we should accept that the FSLN was not only prepared to risk electoral defeat, but may also have recognized that it was a real possibility, albeit by a much slimmer margin than finally transpired. There is, however, precious little evidence that the Frente anticipated the degree to which exhaustion and the desire for peace would be converted into votes for UNO. Of course, 'tactical voting' is essentially unpredictable, and Chamorro's campaign was, by all accounts, extremely unimpressive. Yet I believe that there were at play other factors of rather greater importance to the Left as a whole.

Because of its efforts to secure economic recovery at undeniable cost to the urban poor, public sector employees and the social measures introduced early in the revolution, the FSLN was compelled to base its campaign on what we might call the politics of radical nationalism. Under the prevailing circumstances this required a high degree of commitment, which in turn depended upon mobilization to stir spirits and still despondency through the excitement and comforts of mass demonstration. The Sandinistas have always been very good at this, and had latterly undertaken a nimble shift in approach away from stentorian evocations of valour to more typically populist celebrations, Daniel Ortega dispensing with his camouflaged fatigues and spectacles to lay on salsa and dish out prophylactics and polaroid snaps of supporters in his company. Yet, as Adolfo Gilly has written in a poignant reflection on these events, 'a people cannot be mobilized for an entire lifetime.'<sup>1</sup> The effort was necessary but insufficient.

---

<sup>1</sup> *La Jornada*, Mexico City, 28 February 1990.

Moreover, despite its notable flexibility with respect to policy, in organizational terms the FSLN was poorly positioned to gauge the scope of this insufficiency. Here it should be recognized that an organization called a Front was at its core a vanguard party, and one that had neither held a congress nor conducted internal elections during its entire existence. Whilst it had evaded many of the traits commonly associated with orthodox Leninism, it retained a strong *dirigiste* impetus, not least because the executive features bred of its guerrilla origins had been upheld by the need to fight a war against counter-revolution. The Sandinistas had made substantial efforts to curb the dangers of this producing isolation in power, and they had registered clear signals of discontent—as distinct from opposition—in the operation of the *Comités de Defensa Sandinista* and the criticisms voiced at the 'Cara al Pueblo' meetings addressed by government leaders. Yet they manifestly had difficulty in ridding a prescriptive politics of those presumptions that are essential to fighting a revolution but prejudicial to winning elections.

Perhaps the most important of their misconceptions was that nationalist sentiment can be exhausted but not fulfilled in adversity. Although this may seem to be a strange and contradictory observation, it is surely the case that resistance to the USA had by 1990 not only depleted the reserves of popular energy but also established an unprecedented national identity and instilled sufficient pride for many thousands of Nicaraguans to feel that the 'imagined community' had become real. This was a positive achievement that could outgrow a given form of Sandinismo. Put bluntly, the most transcendent element of national sovereignty—the will to defend it—had been proved. In the sense that many people could now feel proud of being Nicaraguan and still vote against Sandinismo, the Party was victim to the success of its ideology. If, as Eric Hobsbawm has recently emphasized—in a text that looks more askance at nationalism than many on the Latin American Left will find acceptable—nationalism necessarily precedes the nation, then it is not so perverse, as it might at first glance appear, to suggest that the tangible establishment of a nation represents fulfilment as well as demanding adjustment.<sup>2</sup> The 'tactical voting' argument stresses the question of adjustment but tends to depict fulfilment in celebratory before historical terms. It does not know its own strength.

### History Before Ideology

Both the Nicaraguan revolution of 1978–79 and the poll of 1990 incorporated less ideological conflict than is often attributed to them. Although the FSLN directed the overthrow of Somoza, it could only do so in alliance with those anti-somocista forces now leading UNO. The Sandinistas determined the terms of this alliance, pushing it constantly to the 'left' in so far as they successively repudiated compromises designed to protect the apparatus of the dictatorship. This adamant attitude on the question of power also permitted the cohesion of the popular forces around a platform of radical social change;

<sup>2</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, Cambridge 1990.

but it was always governed by the need to maintain the support of liberal constitutionalists. The political importance of the latter should not be underestimated simply because they were later outmanoeuvred, and subsequently scurried off into the arms of Uncle Sam.

Amongst the many attributes of the concatenation of forces in 1978–79, particular note should be taken of the fact that, at the end of the day, the bourgeois opposition to Somoza provided the key in luring a distraught and impotent Washington into tight-lipped acceptance that whilst it could control the outer limits of the conflict, it was unable to achieve a local resolution to its precise liking. There is something of an echo of this situation in 1990 involving the same basic forces and the same relation between the FSLN's insistence on the military question and its tractability on most issues beyond it. Now, of course, the boot is on the other foot; but one should not underestimate the degree to which past as well as present conditions commend engagement between Sandinismo and the traditional currents of Conservatism and Liberalism as a means of keeping the Yankee and his mercenaries at one remove from the negotiation of a local accord. In many respects the 1990 election brought into the open the suppressed competition of 1978–79 within the anti-Somoza bloc. This was and is a very real contest, but it is not one that pits two diametrically opposed political systems against each other.

In the first place, UNO contains the pro-Moscow Communist Party (PSN) and the supposed Maoists of the Partido Comunista de Nicaragua (PCN), the presence of which in the alliance secured pockets of workers' votes, diluted the association of class interests with its anti-authoritarian platform, and precluded the espousal of nakedly neo-liberal economic policies. Secondly, the FSLN had itself already introduced a quite orthodox stabilization plan that denied UNO much mileage in either inveighing against collectivism or embracing a free market alternative that might prove alluring to an electorate yet to experience its social costs. UNO promised the opening of North American coffers and very little else. Equally, Washington's decision to impose Chamorro as the leader of UNO—over the hard-nosed caudillos of the Liberal (Godoy) and Conservative (Calero) currents, which had been steeped in anti-communist vitriol after a decade nursing their wounds in Honduras and investments in Florida—was born of a prescient choice to milk the *simpatía* of the frail, awkward widow of the man whose assassination by Somoza had opened the revolutionary offensive. Yet, although Doña Violeta was never intended to be more than a figurehead, the logistics of the campaign, the precarious unity of UNO, and the need to keep its association with the military forces of the Contra as loose as possible, meant that the leadership of the opposition to the FSLN was delivered to a person who lacked both the disposition and the resource to give an ideological core to a campaign designed to exploit discontent with hunger and war. She had, after all, felt compelled to excuse her politically inspired departure from the revolutionary junta in 1980 on grounds of ill-health; she patently failed to grasp the point behind Fukuyama's 'end of history'; and there was a certain beguiling predictability in her exploitation of the collapse of the Berlin Wall as an image of happy reconciliation,

rather than a metaphor for the termination of tyranny. It is not entirely supercilious to suggest that Chamorro's inability to speak English—unusual amongst the Central American elite—protected her from full programming as a 'unilaterally controlled Latino asset' and encouraged her US sponsors in the belief that she was intellectually dim and lacked political savvy.

In fact, Chamorro possesses a smiling insouciance of almost Reaganite proportions, and this may well have compounded FSLN convictions that the ramshackle UNO campaign required a resolute *machista* response rather than the patient listening and diligent cultivation of village and *barrio* elders that might well have produced a better result. However, as demonstrated by her subsequent skill in securing the formal disarmament of the main Contra forces, Chamorro had the ability to conjure a great deal more than sympathy out of the artless innocence of her persona. Furthermore, the team that was assembled to provide support and protection for those numerous areas of policy where she made no pretence at skill stood at a critical distance from the mainstream of the Contra. Latching onto the clear personalist factor in the UNO victory, this group was able to exploit the factionalism that broke out immediately after the result, and consolidate what their opponents denounced as a cabal of dangerously independent *técnicos* around the new president. The traditionalists were ambushed in their initial efforts to grab a quota of executive power through the guise of a ministry of all the talents, since these were overwhelmingly concentrated in a younger generation of US-educated pragmatists.

The presidential clique's dedication to obtaining a viable bureaucratic transition complemented Chamorro's personal preference and served as a bridge with the FSLN in a manner not dissimilar to that undertaken in 1977-78 by the twelve nominally independent figures known as 'Las Doce'. Equally, the role of family connections should not be ignored, particularly because this traditional ingredient of Nicaraguan politics had only been partially suppressed under the FSLN. Certainly, the ties between the Sandinista leader Joaquín Cuadra and Chamorro's minister of the presidency and son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, greatly assisted progress over the most immediately taxing issue of control of the army. This, though, is only the start; family politics are, if anything, more mercurial than most.

### The Challenge of Transition

The two-month period between the poll and Chamorro's inauguration was one of hyperactivity as the FSLN and UNO negotiated the terms of an extraordinary transition. At the same time, while Washington adopted a low profile, the Contra opened what was effectively an independent campaign of pressure on both parties, accentuating the importance of the military question, which was from the start the central political issue at stake. On the economic front, the main area of contention was the agrarian reform, on which Chamorro initially made obscure and contradictory declarations, but which, by virtue of the extent of land expropriated since 1979, was bound to exercise the traditional parties as well as the large number of beneficiaries for

whom this was the most tangible gain made under the revolution. However, since 1980 the reform had passed through several distinct phases and established different types of agricultural enterprise. This provided a degree of flexibility in making alterations, which were initially targeted on the collective state-owned farms established at an early stage largely on the basis of alienated somocista property. These could be privatized as coherent units on a secure ideological basis and with a relatively modest risk of provoking a backlash.

However, the cooperatives and those individual plots distributed since 1986 posed much more taxing difficulties for UNO in terms of both consistent policy and political danger. It was in this area that the FSLN had established a firm constituency which could be expected to put up staunch resistance if the new government attempted to placate dispossessed landlords with a significant offensive against the reform. Consequently, the government sought to hold back the UNO hardliners whilst endeavouring to square their demands with the prospect of considerable opposition, not only in the countryside but also in Congress, where the FSLN could expect to gain the votes of important UNO currents on this question. Here, then, the heterogeneous nature of UNO, the substantial Sandinista representation in the legislature, and the pragmatic character of the presidential group, combined to impede reactionary advance on a core issue: that of property. Whatever the eventual outcome, it is highly unlikely to produce the type of scenario that might be expected in the wake of an unencumbered counter-revolutionary conquest of power.

The government's problems in the urban sphere were made manifest in sharper and more immediate form, when, in May, civil servants staged a largely successful strike for a wage rise to compensate for the devaluations rapidly introduced by the new administration. The political aspects of this action were accentuated by the FSLN's declaration that henceforth it would 'govern from below', and the threat of the government to fire the strikers, who were mostly Sandinista supporters. It should also be noted that the conflict occurred when the Contra was still resisting demobilization, and the threat of revived clashes with the army appeared high. This undoubtedly weakened Chamorro's nerve. Nevertheless, the swift reaction of the public labour force clearly showed the strength of the Sandinista rank and file, and suggested that the FSLN was, in one sense, better able to protect them against UNO than against itself. The coming period will surely see this ability subjected to much sharper tests, not least because the UNO parties can be expected to demand posts for their followers and the firing of civil servants whose working conditions have so far only been altered by Chamorro's matronly prohibition of 'provocative clothing'. In Nicaragua's climate such a reimposition of bourgeois formality is rather less petty than it appears, but it stands as nought compared with the purges and patronage battles looming on the horizon.

The delays in disbursement of US aid also underlined the precarious nature of expectations of a bonanza. (The experience of Grenada provides a sobering example in this respect.)<sup>3</sup> The economy remained in

---

<sup>3</sup> James Ferguson, *Grenada. Revolution in Reverse*, London 1990.



a thoroughly calamitous state, and despite James Baker's assurances, there were now contesting claims on North American largesse from new mendicants whose gratification promised greater political reward. As a result, the government could anticipate growing popular dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, the extent to which the Nicaraguan populace had been driven to use survival tactics within the 'informal economy' limited any expectations of such discontent developing into a union-based mass campaign, despite the strength of the Sandinista organizations. Equally, if the promise of bread began to look threadbare, UNO still stood in a good position to deliver peace, which was arguably as important to its popularity.

The military question is as complex as it is acute. On the one hand, the Contra's relations with the Chamorro group were uneasy, combining somocista disdain for those who had acquiesced in the overthrow of the dictatorship, with the profound suspicion that the FSLN had once again contrived to dupe the politicians. At the same time, of course, the counter-revolutionary troops had been subjected to unalloyed anti-communist propaganda, and had visited exceptionally vicious attrition on many rural communities. It is unsurprising that they could not readily accept that the Bolshevik ogre might graciously accede to the decision of a ballot; to believe this was to cast doubt on much of the rationale for the hardships they had imposed and suffered. These troops were largely *campesinos* whose indoctrination naturally omitted the finer points of the 'strategy of tension' or 'low-intensity warfare' that scarcely offer even the most humble cannon fodder a compelling cause for which to lay down its life. Moreover, the Contra had just cause to fear retribution for its barbarism. If the gringos attached to its field commanders urged mendacity and manoeuvre, their political masters in Washington had cut back funds and seemed to acquiesce in an accord with an enemy who remained fully armed and mobilized.

On the other hand, both Washington and UNO had concentrated their energies on demanding both a change in the nature of the *Ejército Popular Sandinista* (EPS) from an 'arm of the party' to a 'neutral national force', and a substantial reduction in its numbers. In its most extreme variant such a proposal signified the complete dismantling of the principal agent and ultimate guarantor of the revolution, opening the distinct possibility of white terror. Yet the political conditions did not permit such a maximum programme. First, the army remained undefeated and had effectively reduced the Contra to tactical skirmishing and sabotage. Secondly, despite its tide and the dominance of the FSLN in the high command, it was far from a purely sectarian force and was widely accepted—albeit often grudgingly—as a national organization integral to the revolutionary experience as well as to its state. Many young men had died in its service, and it is a reasonable bet that many who voted against the FSLN were proud of its achievements in much the same way as Cuban citizens who would never join the CP could honour the valour of their troops in Angola. The widespread dislike of the draft reflected a natural desire for peace and aversion to the exigencies and dangers of military life, but it had never mutated into a popular campaign against Sandinista militarism.

Thirdly, the FSLN had made it very clear that it would only contemplate limited negotiations on the issue—as required by the peace treaties and as justified by its support within both the electorate and the officer corps, whose corporate interests could be disaggregated from the Party but not from the revolution as a whole.

### Guarantees Against Retribution

The demobilization of the Contra was essential to UNO both to confirm its acceptance of the international treaties that underwrote its existence and to consolidate the legitimacy of its political enterprise. Yet the continuation of Sandinista forces not only harboured the threat of a coup but also implied acceptance of the revolutionary state. The dilemma was sharper than in any other Latin American transition, and the abundance of weapons held by the citizenry made its resolution essential if the electoral challenge made by the FSLN was not to collapse in renewed chaos and civil war. However, the international scenario could only have encouraged those elements in UNO that had not been die-hard somocistas to accept what was, in effect, a reversion to the cohabitation with a Bonapartist force that had been the lot of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie since the establishment of the National Guard in the late 1920s. The conduct of the EPS was infinitely more dependable and civilized than that of the Contra, and the combination of reshuffled senior appointments and formal resignations from the Party leadership permitted those Sandinistas whose primary vocation had become institutional to hold their positions and safeguard the revolutionary inheritance.

Again, a little history. In May 1927 Sandino alone refused to sign the Pact of Espino Negro, organized by Washington to terminate the civil war between the Liberals and Conservatives. His reason was the continued presence of US troops on Nicaraguan soil. In August 1987 the FSLN agreed to the Esquipulas accord principally on the grounds that it provided for the elimination of Washington's mercenaries from the national politico-military conflict. In 1933 the withdrawal of the US marines prompted Sandino to accept a cessation of hostilities, to disarm and acquiesce in the resumption of traditional political competition. Within months, he and many of his troops, who had set up a cooperative agricultural community in the interior, were murdered by Somoza's National Guard. Washington was dismayed but did nothing. In 1990 the Sandinistas, keenly sensitive to the lessons of the past, will not tolerate the slightest risk of repeating the fateful mistake made by their forebear. If the old parties are to return, there must be optimal guarantees against retribution, and the constitution of a new militarist sultanate under their wing. Now it is the Contras who are to become pioneer farmers, protected by smooth Spanish generals and indulgent Venezuelan paratroopers against any settling of scores.

At the distance of a few weeks it would be foolhardy in the extreme to aver that this apparently diligent compromise will hold. The citizen army of the revolution's early years has been greatly transformed, but enough of its ethos persists to qualify the non-partisan pretensions of professionalism. It will be exceptionally difficult to conduct deals with

Contra warlords such as Israel Galeano, a bloated brute who relishes his record of butchery and yet, along with similar specimens, must now be treated with equanimity as a respected political interlocutor rather than as a common murderer. This—the message echoes from all quarters—is the price of peace. But it is less than a poor guarantee, and we may expect the disarmament agreement to be sharply tested in the coming months on these grounds alone.

Two other possibilities also deserve mention. The first is that the USA will attempt to transform the original compromise into a much more substantial restructuring of the armed forces with the aim of eradicating all but the vestiges of Sandinismo, as vociferously demanded by the ultramontane parties in UNO. This is a logical and beguiling option for those who have been treated to so many beatings at the hands of the EPS. Yet Washington's loathing is sensibly curbed by fear; and if it desisted from a thorough purge of Noriega's PDF, which it trounced in a direct fight, on the grounds that such a move would create more problems than it would solve, this rationale is far more justified in the case of an unvanquished soldiery characterized by a strong sense of mission and years of experience in guerrilla warfare. Secondly, one cannot ignore the possibility that—as hinted above—the new conditions will encourage an institutionalized deepening of those Bonapartist features inherent in Sandinismo but hitherto checked by both the tenure of political power and widespread popular support. Again, the prospects of this are slight, if only because the experience of recent months has underscored the FSLN's need to reinvigorate those critical and receptive aspects of its politics that had become numbed by the demands of holding state power for a prolonged period in conditions of virtual civil war.

In this regard, the decision to hold a Party congress and elections is likely to produce debate of an intensity not witnessed since 1975–77, when the three tendencies of the FSLN engaged in a bitter dispute over strategy. In the immediate aftermath of the election, there was talk of a current of *suragés*, principally amongst the Party's youth, breaking free from what could be presented as an organization that had lost its radical vocation and capitulated to the familiar sirens of reconciliation. Although such a response must be understood in terms of the bitter mood of the moment, it should not be forgotten that the mantle of anti-imperialism has long veiled an appreciable diversity of views within the FSLN. In 1978–79 the *Tercerista* faction headed by the Ortega brothers was able to impose its strategy of combining flexibility over political alliances with aggressive determination in military matters. In the process, the more cautious and class-based approaches of the *Proletario* (Wheelock) and *Guerra Popular Prolongada* (Borge) tendencies were suspended but never fully discarded. In opposition and with the direct US military threat converted into a more insidious political influence, there may well be some disaggregation of the Sandinismo that was born of an insurrectionary concordat and sustained by the Yanqui siege. At the very least, its terms will have to be reappraised.

## External Reaction: The Right

The strength of the international response to the UNO victory is unremarkable. Although global political attention was concentrated at the time on events in Eastern Europe, the fact that the Nicaraguan revolution had been denounced and celebrated with such energy, particularly in the USA, for more than a decade, meant that the poll was bound to attract considerable attention, and its result certain to be accorded critical significance. Naturally, conservative opinion proclaimed this to be a further resounding death knell for socialism, all the more sweet to the ear for occurring in the Western hemisphere. The domino theory that had become unfashionable as a device for propagating anti-communism now appeared to have gone gloriously into reverse, albeit with minimal enterprise on the part of its most devout adepts. For the first time in twenty years, serious thought might be given to the question of counter-revolution in Cuba, which presented certain logistical difficulties because it was an island, but which could not hope to resist for long the cause of freedom coursing through the ether (helped a touch by the broadcasts of Radio and Television Martí from Florida).

Such ebullience was predictable and directly affected the outlook of the Left, whose nervousness had already been sharpened by the invasion of Panama—the fate long feared for Nicaragua itself. In tactical terms it seemed as if the USA would now reserve direct use of military force for its anti-narcotics campaign, the righteousness of which could sustain the attendant political and diplomatic risks, whilst anti-communism could be left to the indisputably reasonable requirement of free and fair elections. This is relevant because all the evidence indicates that Washington was preparing to accept the holding of a poll in Nicaragua as justification in itself for some subsequent modest rapprochement with the FSLN, and that it was no less surprised than the Left by the final result—a happy bonus for which it was ill-prepared.

Two broad factors are at work in this respect. The first, and more contingent, is the experience of Eastern Europe since mid 1989. This produced a close association of the formal convocation of elections by radical regimes with dissident popular pressure. Despite the unacceptably high level of support for the ex-CPs in later polls (particularly Bulgaria and Romania), the whole thrust of the new wave of elections was decidedly anti-communist and could be championed as an intrinsic feature of burgeoning liberal capitalism. If regimes that for decades had been classed as dictatorships now called polls, they did not do so voluntarily, and were unable to derive any credit from this correct administration of the last rites. To be sure, the defeat of the regime was not anticipated in the case of Nicaragua, but the global conditions prevailing early in 1990 greatly reduced potential US embarrassment at a FSLN success, which would be rendered tolerable—if scarcely palatable—by the fact that Sandinista claims to an unassailable democratic mandate would be dimmed by the global surge in the opposite ideological direction. This also, of course, provided a veneer of plausibility to accepting the FSLN's calling of the

USA's bluff over demands for a poll that few in Washington had seriously intended to be the final objective of the formidable aggression they had unleashed against Managua.

The unexpected turn of events in Europe complemented the US electoralist strategy for Latin America in that it could now safely be extended to include radical sponsorship of liberal-democratic procedure without causing undue damage to US hegemony (understood as distinct from direct power). Hitherto, acceptance of electoral transitions from dictatorship in South America and the sponsorship of 'demonstration elections' in Central America, where the killing continued and the fraud became more sophisticated and consequential, had not involved serious ideological risk. Although the abandonment of the desultory 'lesser evil' rationale for supporting murderous autocracy had entailed acceptance of Communist ministers in Bolivia (during the UDP regime of 1982-85), a quite truculent APRA administration in Peru (1985-90), and the embarrassment of success for straight-talking psychopaths in El Salvador, it had not disturbed Washington's projection of the Left as residually incapable of taking the democratic initiative, rather than participating as a subordinate current whose mendacity and instrumentalism might safely be indulged. Now the FSLN's thunder in upsetting this comfortable pattern was stolen by the European wind. This is also important in so far as the only response previously available to Washington was to proclaim democracy in Nicaragua to be the product of its own profoundly undemocratic pressure, the results of which were gratifyingly successful in terms of realpolitik but could barely be trumpeted to the world with any expectation of the USA being seen as the virtuous party. In the event, of course, Chamorro's victory made reliance upon this justification unnecessary, even if the die-hards trundled it out anyway.

Inside Latin America, conservative celebration of the election result reflected relief that the developments in Europe were not continentally bound and had encouraged the ascendance of a neo-conservative *Weltanschauung* in those parts of the world that—perhaps 'through their own irresponsibility'—had hitherto resisted its lures. While varieties of conservatism have had considerable strength in Latin America, a protean corporatism has continually disturbed the optimum operation of market forces. No doubt the Mexican Constitution was a paltry counterpart to Bolshevism, and a Betancourt or Arévalo proved to be little match for the likes of Mao, Rákosi or Novotny (only Perón was a truly valid contender), but escape from the alien infections of 1917 and 1945-49 had only produced a local radicalism all the more alarming for its modernity. With adjectival economy, the term *comunismo criollo* encapsulates the conservative perception. The disparaged home-grown variant was especially pernicious in that it was precisely its disguise that had nurtured success. Neither Castro nor the Sandinista *Comandantes* had seized power 'fairly and squarely' in the name of socialism. Whether by design ('Leninism through stealth') or default ('purblind Yanqui overreaction to nationalism') they had hustled history. Yet the initial ideological camouflage was soon stripped away to reveal a dependency on Soviet Communism that was as dull as it was dangerous. Where, for simple as well as

complicated reasons, this had not occurred—Bolivia in 1952–64, Guatemala in 1944–54, Dominican Republic in 1963–65, Chile in 1970–73—the radical challenge was either suffocated slowly or shot to pieces. Now that official Communism was mortally wounded ‘at home’, regional socialism lacked the only endgame that had yielded success.

The regional political panorama early in 1990 was not one of unambiguous success for the Right. Vargas Llosa's resounding defeat in Peru had sharply deflated reactionary arrogance, and Aylwin's comfortable victory in Chile required readjustment to the fairweather friendship of Christian Democracy, which conservatives view with significant suspicion—a fact often ignored by the Left. Equally, if Collor in Brazil, Menem in Argentina, Pérez in Venezuela, and Salinas in Mexico were all endeavouring to impose deflationary policies, and appeared to be wrestling free of the statism that they had initially advocated, or to which they had seemed to be shackled, this process was erratic—engendering sharp social discontent, and promising some populist surprises. Even in Panama the euphoria over the US invasion had rapidly been replaced by dismay at the ineptitude of the Endara regime and the bickering amongst an unpopular comprador clique of oligarchic pretensions. The zero-sum view of politics was temporarily boosted by the fact that in 1989 and 1990 there had been an election in every Latin American country except Cuba, Mexico (1988) and Guatemala (due in late 1990), and that in each the Left had been beaten, in many cases very soundly indeed. Yet in Mexico and Brazil the extent of support for the candidates of the Left is reaching impressive levels. More generally, neither the reversion to constitutional government, nor the failure of orthodox stabilization to provoke popular revolt, provide a firm basis for conservative hegemony. The former was very largely the product of mass pressure, and the latter owed more to apprehension and exhaustion than to positive acquiescence. In such a context, reactionary celebration of the travails of the Left signalled relief at the diminution of its worst fears, but it was not a triumphalism that could be expected long to outlive the impulse of successive election victories.

Within Central America, the Right had more pressing cause to express relief, although this was principally in terms of the propagandistic benefits of the defeat of Sandinismo rather than at the removal of a concrete threat to the status quo. In the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador the expectation was that the change of regime in Managua would accelerate negotiations already begun with the insurgent forces, and that it would reduce the intransigence of the radicals. Here, though, it is worth noting that such a possibility had existed well before the 1987 peace agreement, being determined by the national balance of forces before all else. Moreover, as the Right in both Guatemala and El Salvador was quick to discover, success in Nicaragua was a two-edged sword, since it removed the principal North American rationale for the indulgence and munificent funding of their own barbarism. As Washington cut back military aid, raised questions about links with the cocaine trade, and began to complain about the violation of human rights, the Janus-like qualities of reactionary nationalism

became more evident, and the ruling bloc started to manifest signs of indecision and factionalism.

The FMLN's offensive of November 1989, extensive popular mobilization in Guatemala City over bus-fare rises, and a fierce public-sector strike in Honduras during the spring of 1990, all underlined the extent to which the ruling class in these countries could ill afford to rest on its laurels either as *victor ludorum* in counterfeit polls or as overseer of military conquest. They knew better than Washington that the poor of their countries had long since ceased to be mesmerized by the FSLN's 'good example', because of the hammering Nicaraguans had taken as a result. They also knew that Sandinista logistical aid to the Left elsewhere in the isthmus was absolutely minimal, and that US claims over this were risible except for the purposes of propaganda.

The regional accord of August 1987 signalled grudging conservative acceptance of cohabitation with the FSLN. It offered Honduras relief from the marauding Contras camped on its territory; El Salvador some modest extra purchase in dealing with the redoubtable FMLN; Costa Rica a chance to safeguard its borders and liberal-democratic traditions; and Guatemala an improved climate in which to press its claims to democratic status. All governments sought a modicum of autonomy from the USA and the conditions under which interregional trade might assist recovery from acute economic depression. These factors remain dominant, and, with the exception of the demobilization of the Contra, are little altered by the change of government in Nicaragua. Chamorro can offer little new of substance to her regional peers. Her arrival has lifted their spirits but also complicated their lives.

#### External Reaction: The Left

Although there were some supporters of the revolution who obviously believed that the Sandinistas simply could not lose the poll, and others who would only have countenanced such a possibility if the FSLN itself had signalled it, virtually nobody—even amongst those who were highly critical of FSLN insufficiencies—had given serious attention to the possible ramifications of defeat. Subsequent reactions must, therefore, be treated with proper recognition of the fact that these stemmed from immediate trauma and were largely directed at recovery from an entirely unexpected shock. Hence the energy with which virtue was extracted out of necessity, particularly in terms of the FSLN's democratic vocation, which had been a major feature of North American opposition to Washington's aggression. For that appreciable constituency—especially in the USA but also in Western Europe—for whom Sandinista defiance of imperial arrogance had largely been free of the traditional ideological polarities and their attendant embarrassments, there was a peculiarly cruel irony in the vindication of their beliefs through the collapse of their cause. Yet it was in the nature of their support that they did not feel betrayed.

The reasons for the emergence of such a constituency are as interesting as they are complex, and it is evident that it cannot simply be dismissed as a chronologically convenient outburst of 'Third Worldism'

or modish fellow-travelling. Some on the Left—myself included—have taken a far too lofty view of this phenomenon, tending to see its singular energy as little more than emotional displacement, and its advocacy as either disingenuous or too bravely innocent to comprehend that unreserved solidarity not only surrenders hostages to fortune but also unerringly mistakes conformity for unity, and independent thought for sectarianism. Perhaps this image stems from excessive caution about support for any party that holds state power. It is also possibly rooted in the too cynical view that the FSLN was idolized because it was 'my enemy's enemy' or simply because it was successful. Losing an election is not heroic, and will test the resilience of the Sandinistas' international following, albeit in a manner quite distinct from that after the defeats of the Spanish Republic and *Unidad Popular* in Chile. Yet those whose internationalism understood Nicaragua as less than sublimely sui generis, and which also incorporated knowledge and experience of sundry causes either lost or seemingly doomed to perpetual adversity, should remind themselves that a revolution is nothing if it cannot be celebrated.

The consequences of the election defeat within the more orthodox confines of the Left are no less acute, particularly in Latin America. There has been some predictable and necessary criticism of Sandinista errors in the campaign itself as well as of the Party's economic policy over recent years. However, what is notable about the reaction, at least amongst those currents not dedicated to plying arid doctrinal certainties, is the general absence of recrimination, support for a retreat to the hills, or serious dispute over the fact that the relation between 'armed struggle' and the 'peaceful road to socialism' is more complex when the Left holds state power than when it is assailed by it. The principal strategic debates derived from the experiences of Cuba and Chile have lost their sectarian impetus almost everywhere. Nonetheless, it may be expected that some of their constituent features will now be revived and will very possibly exercise more influence over the Latin American Left than have events in Europe. In this respect it strikes me as highly likely that northern socialists will undervalue—by reason of both their history and the current focus on Europe—the continuing importance placed by Latin American radicals on the power of counter-revolution. However valid the perceptions of 'imperial overreach', the unsavoury singularity of the conditions in Panama that prompted the US invasion, and the shift by both Washington and national dominant blocs towards constitutionalism, neither domestic US concerns nor conditions in Latin America itself justify claims to a regional 'end of history' eradicating regular cycles of barbarism and doleful impositions of North American 'manifest destiny'. This is not to say that 'redemocratization' is merely ephemeral or that US intromission is incapable of major mutations of both form and degree, but it is to signal that there is palpable reason in daily life from Tijuana to Tierra del Fuego to harbour sharp reservations about the opening of new eras.

It is probably this factor above any other that underpins the continuing respect in which the Cuban government continues to be held, even by those who have long attacked it as a Stalinist apparatus, and



notwithstanding the recent chilling recourse to show trials and executions. In the wake of the Nicaraguan reverse it is surely as true as it is sentimental to see Cuba as the last bastion against the empire. If Castro's politics make this and his expectations of historical absolution increasingly tenuous, it should at least be recognized that the circumstances prevailing in mid 1990 also enhance the symbolic strength of his regime as a bulwark against the gringo, who, together with his eager accomplices, promises far worse villainy. Many of the parallels with Europe being drawn by the pundits are highly inexact in both geopolitical and emotional terms.

Apprehension about heightened US ambitions on Cuba is not misplaced because of the electoral form taken by imperial success in Nicaragua. Superficially this would seem precisely to reverse the trajectory of the Chilean experience, which provided many lessons for the FSLN leadership and which has renewed resonance in the present reversion to the division of powers. Yet if the differences between Chile and Nicaragua are legion, they do not include the role played by the USA, which imposed an economic siege and sponsored terror in both cases. In the first, Allende's long-standing attempt to assert a socialist hegemony through the institutions of bourgeois liberalism was finally terminated by the coup—a risk accepted as integral to the enterprise. In the second, the insurrectionary conquest of power, and establishment of a popular army in its wake, effectively precluded the threat of a military coup but still could not forestall vicious military pressure from outside. The conditions for resisting defeat by force directly enhanced the conditions for defeat through election, the risks of which were certainly not so integral to the revolutionary project but could only be dismissed at exceptionally high cost. Thus, even in the post-dictatorial era, there is a plausible argument that these two signally innovative radical experiments fell foul of the trap of liberal constitutionalism, as well as North American aggression. If the Sandinistas left office with their lives and considerable opportunities to fight another day, many more Nicaraguans than Chileans had died at the hands of the counter-revolution. Seen in this pessimistic light, the Sandinistas may well have had no option, but they ended up moving from the frying-pan to the fire.

### The Challenge Ahead

However narrow and wilful such an interpretation might be, it stands close enough to the facts to put us on our guard against single-minded dedication to ideological struggle when the enemy remains fully possessed of naked power and is readily prepared to deploy it. Equally, as the FSLN has long recognized, it underlines the danger of making a complete identification between the protocols of liberal constitutionalism and the respect and practice of civil liberties. The general argument is far too familiar to merit further elaboration in this context. Of greater immediate relevance is the manner in which it will be taken forward in conditions where the Right has in most countries dominated a transition to civilian government after prolonged dictatorship and with increasing immiseration of the masses. Here the impact of Nicaragua is most likely to be felt in the sense that the revolution

provided a vital instance of radical initiative for a continental movement largely forced to depend upon a denunciatory discourse set by the logic of opposition and minimally enlivened by the image of 'actually existing socialism'. Sandinismo not only posed the 'threat of a good example' to Washington, it also provided positive sustenance to radicals driven from the adversities of dictatorship to those of constitutionalism—a shift that presents its own difficulties, as well as harbouring those peculiar to the two poles between which it takes place. Thus, it was not just the FSLN's anti-imperialism and the prestige of its victory that was of consequence to the continental movement. Its commitment to an unsubmitive pluralism—much criticized by unreconstructed advocates of the dictatorship of the proletariat and by those who simply saw this as the thin end of the wedge—provided a strategic blueprint that both bisected the extremes witnessed in Cuba and Chile, and could be seen as more broadly applicable than the other experiences, despite the widely recognized peculiarities of the revolution. Put bluntly, although the manner of Somoza's overthrow and the ideological fabric of Sandinismo were without a shadow of doubt *sui generis*, the subsequent political development of the revolution proffered ideas and models that were not—need not be—tied to their historical origins, and that more adequately addressed strategic preoccupations elsewhere than, in their time, had Cuba and Chile.

If such observations have any value, it could be said that the FSLN's defeat at the polls is likely to be both more and less consequential in its ramifications for regional radicalism than the Chilean coup and the bureaucratic ossification in Cuba. In contrast to the former, it has the advantage of permitting the Left to fight another day, but also the disadvantage that this eventuality was allowed for when full power was held and so incubates a fundamental pessimism. In contrast to the latter, it has the advantage of allowing a genuine ideological context and thereby subjecting the Left to a continuous and enriching challenge; but also, quite obviously, the disadvantage of surrendering the gains made at high cost over many years to electoral decision in highly inequitable conditions. This latter contrast implies a profound optimism. The fact that nowhere else in Central America are these major dilemmas present in advanced form does not mean that they are ignored by a left-wing movement that has been quite exceptionally embattled. The lessons were, indeed, anticipated in the Salvadorean guerrillas' acceptance of a variegated strategy for a ceasefire from early 1984, as well as in the severe setbacks suffered by the Guatemalan rebels in 1981–82, when the militarist logic of their offensive blinded them to the terrible consequences for an unconsulted population. In these countries it has become an iron rule for the Left that it cannot act with authority unless it can shoot straight and listen quietly. This axiom is likely to hold for some time to come in Nicaragua too.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

# **1991 Marxist Scholars Conference** **Temple University, Philadelphia** **14-17 March 1991**

The 1991 Marxist Scholars Conference, sponsored by the Marxist Educational Press, will take place at a time when Marxists are subjecting to critical examination positions long considered to be basic to Marxist social thought. This conference can make important contributions both to the reaffirmation of fundamental Marxist principles and to the identification of weaknesses in theory, method, and practice. Papers and proposals are welcome from all fields of study. Send one copy of papers or workshop proposals to each of the following persons by 15 October 1990:

Prof. David Schwartz  
Economics Department  
Albright College  
P.O. Box 15234  
Reading, PA 19612

Prof. Harold Schwartz  
Medical School  
Box 91 Mayo  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Sponsored by the Marxist Educational Press, publisher of the journal *Nature, Society, and Thought* and two series of books, *Studies in Marxism* and *Marxist Dimensions*. For further information on the conference or for a free catalog write to MEP, 215 Ford Hall, University of Minnesota, 224 Church St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455 (tel. 612/922-7993).

# AGRARIAN CAPITALISM

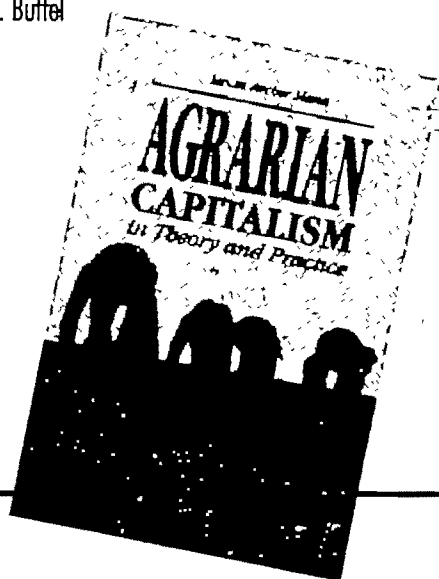
## IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

BY SUSAN ARCHER MANN

"Mann has crafted an original and sophisticated theoretical framework for the analysis of agricultural production and rural society. . . . This book deserves close examination by sociologists, economists, and historians struggling to understand the dynamics of uneven development and the persistence of non-wage production systems." —Robert J. Thomas

"One of the most provocative theoretical and empirical syntheses of the vast scholarship on the southern plantation economy." —Frederick H. Buttel

228 pp., \$29.95



available at bookstores or from

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS**

Post Office Box 2288 / Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2288

**TOLL-FREE ORDERS: 1-800-818-6224**

*Scanner*

Lynne Jones

## Murder in Guatemala

This is a murder story. P.D. James once commented that the satisfaction of murder stories comes not only from the intellectual exercise but from the value given to individual human life, even after death: the dead person matters, justice is seen to be done. My story is set in Guatemala however. There is no mystery, no satisfying resolution, and what it demonstrates is just how cheaply life is valued in this particular civilian democracy.\*

Mrs Maria Mejia was a 47-year-old Maya woman who lived in the village of Parraxtut, in the Quiche province in the western highlands of Guatemala. It is a region of breathtaking beauty, where fantastic cloud formations compete for attention with the ridged and folded, pine-clad landscape. The small whitewashed adobe houses surrounded by blossoming fruit trees, cornfields and grazing sheep have a romantic air that belies the violence and exploitation this population has suffered. In the nineteenth century around 2.5 million acres was seized for coffee, sugar and cotton plantation development, serviced by a system of migrant labour whereby the highland Maya must spend months working for below-subsistence wages on the coastal plantations. It was this region that suffered most heavily in the early 1980s, when, under the guise of countering Marxist-Leninist subversion, whole communities were massacred and villages destroyed. Mrs Mejia's first husband was just one of the estimated 100,000 killed and 35,000 who 'disappeared' in this period.

Mrs Mejia was murdered at 7.30 pm on Saturday, 17 March 1990 when two armed men burst into her house and shot her and her second husband. He survived to identify the killers as two military commissioners from his village, Juan de Leon and Domingo Castro. (Military Commissioners are former soldiers who continue to be paid

---

\* This article is based on research and interviews conducted in Guatemala in March and April 1990 under the auspices of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. It also draws on information from the following sources: *Americas Watch Reports*, 'Human Rights in Guatemala in President Cerezo's First Year', 1987; 'Closing the Space, Human Rights in Guatemala, May 1987–October 1988', 1988; 'Messengers of Death, Human Rights in Guatemala, November 1988–February 1990', 1990; 'The Rumbel Junam Council of Ethnic Communities', 1989. W. George Lovell, 'An Instinct to Survive', *The Whig Standard Magazine*, January 1986. *Central America Reports*, Infopress Centroamericana.

and armed by the army to act as their representatives in the community.) Her death was reported on the Tuesday as one of twenty-five that had occurred in the previous 24 hours—a statistic that bears witness to the complete failure of Vinicio Cerezo's Christian Democrat government to provide the people with any real security. At his inauguration in 1986, there were hopes that the first civilian government for twenty years might do something to ameliorate Guatemala's desperate human rights situation. When I interviewed Cerezo at that time, he emphasized his determination to 'establish a state of law regarding human rights... We are not going to have a sham democracy in this country. If I stay in power it is because I am making decisions. If not, we will be having this discussion in Miami.' Dr Francisco Villagran Kramer, himself a former vice president, who fled the country in 1978 and returned in 1986, pointed out 'the fantastic leverage' that Cerezo had: namely, 'the support of other governments who would have refused to recognize the army if it kicked him out. He didn't use it. Power is very tempting and his objective became finishing the term of office.'

The ability of the military to dictate terms was demonstrated at the outset by Cerezo agreeing to an amnesty for all past abuses. However, there was a limited opening for popular organizations; a number of prominent exiles returned from abroad; and an attempt was made to create an independent national police force. The coup attempt of May 1988 marked a turning point. Although it failed, Cerezo appears to have had to make a number of concessions to stay in office, including limiting the growth of human-rights groups, cancelling the dialogue with the guerrillas, and ending all efforts to create the independent police force. Subsequently, human-rights abuses have steadily increased. Political leaders, labour organizers, teachers, human-rights monitors, students, church figures and peasants have all been targeted. At times the violence has been focused on one particular group—as in the autumn of 1989 when eight university students were killed and seven disappeared, thereby hitting at the student organizations. More recently, there have been greater problems in rural areas. Accurate figures are hard to establish. Rodolpho Roblez, director of the Guatemala section of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers, points out, 'many political killings are disguised as common crime.' He estimated, for example, that in the preceding week (the third week of April) 180 people had been killed for political reasons. The external Commission for Human Rights in Guatemala has recorded 55 extrajudicial killings and 14 disappearances between January and March. While Ramiro De Leon Carpio, human-rights ombudsman in Guatemala, has recorded 63 killings and 76 disappearances for the same period.

The gravity of the situation is best indicated by the unprecedented severity of the US State Department's chapter on Guatemala in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1989, in which it cited two thousand assassinations in that year, including 'some by death squads and ultra-Right groups'. It went on to acknowledge the involvement of military personnel in some areas, the 'poor human-rights record and high level of corruption' of the national and treasury

police. The US ambassador to Guatemala, Thomas Stroock, also condemned the continuing violations, saying publicly that the US Government found it very strange that none of the kidnappings and assassinations of students and political and union leaders had been solved. (This new-found US righteousness may reflect suspicion of the Guatemalan regime's role in the drug traffic, and its declining value as a bastion against Sandinismo.) When Cerezo condemned the ambassador's 'meddling', the US response was that to avoid comment would be to make it a silent accomplice. Meanwhile the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva agreed that the situation required increased monitoring—although it has not been placed in the 'worst offender' category.

The best that Americas Watch (a US human-rights organization) can say about Cerezo is that he is probably not actively involved in the repression. However, he has done nothing to prevent it or to bring the perpetrators to justice. Cerezo claims that members of the Far Right, backed by foreign terrorists, are responsible. The Minister of Defence, General Gramajo, told me that there might be some unsupervised police deep in the countryside, but on the whole blamed the terror on the 'dirty work of personal bodyguards belonging to high ranking officials'. This, he said, was not 'a matter for shame', as Guatemala was moving forward slowly: 'Sometimes I like to compare Guatemala to Georgia in the thirties: how were the owners of farms against the Blacks? All these things have to happen, it is a normal revolution of society.' Guatemala was, after all, better than Kampuchea. 'The armed forces are professionals. We have the power not to use power, in order to leave room for people to participate.' However, in his report to Congress, human-rights ombudsman De Leon Carpio stated that between 1 January and 20 March he had received 16 denunciations of human-rights abuses against the army, 16 against the police and 7 against the army-sponsored civil patrols. In Americas Watch, scrupulous reports, as well as eyewitness and circumstantial evidence, implicate the security forces on numerous occasions; while the US Country Reports also recognize that 'military personnel are mentioned in extrajudicial killings in rural areas.'

### Militarization of the Countryside

Whatever the role of the army in specific cases, there is no doubt that the militarization of the countryside in itself constitutes an enormous abuse of freedom. Prior to 1980, there were six military regions; there are now twenty-three. The base outside Solola has a turret shaped like a military boot—a clear signal to a largely illiterate rural population. A sign on the wall of the base outside the predominantly Indian town of Santa Cruz del Quiche reminds the population that 'Here we are all Guatemala; it is your duty and ours to know, love and defend her.' For some 900,000 peasants, this duty requires forced service in the civil patrols. These were set up in 1982 by Rios Montt as part of the army's counterinsurgency strategy. From the government's point of view the recruitment of adult males into an unpaid, local, self-defence unit was a brilliant way of providing low-cost security and controlling the rural population. From the villagers' point of view, it was onerous,

unpaid and often dangerous work that took time from their own fields that they could ill afford. Patrol duty usually consists of 24 hours patrolling every week. Those on patrol are expected to report any subversive activity. They may have to do manual labour for the army, and on occasion, poorly armed with machetes and elderly rifles, have been pushed into frontline confrontations with guerrillas. In the past, patrollers have also been forced by the army to commit atrocities; and as recently as 1989 have been the victims of atrocities themselves. On 17 August, army soldiers from a base near Coban shot and killed nine patrollers and wounded three. The army admitted responsibility for the 'tragedy', but so far no one has been arrested for the crime.

The army has always maintained that the patrols are voluntary. Gramajo insisted that the idea came spontaneously from villagers themselves. Article 34 of Guatemala's 1985 Constitution states clearly that 'the right to freedom of association is hereby recognized. No individual shall be forced to associate with, or form part of, groups or associations of self-defence or similar organizations.' However, those individuals who do not want to patrol are immediately labelled as guerrillas, communists and subversives, and subjected to threats and intimidation by the military and patrol chiefs. Since 1988 this resistance has taken a more organized form. With the help of Amilcar Mendez, a charismatic schoolteacher from Santa Cruz del Quiche, various groups and individuals came together to form the Runujel Junam Council for Ethnic Communities (CERJ—Runujel Junam means 'we are all equal' in Quiche) whose stated aims include the 'defence of the cultural and human rights of Guatemala's different indigenous communities; complete respect for and compliance with human rights throughout Guatemala; meaningful and complete land reform; full literacy; elimination of sub-standard housing; and the elimination of discrimination and ethnic prejudice.' CERJ is an extraordinary phenomenon: a grassroots, rural human-rights movement that functions as a cross between nonviolent protest group, legal-aid office, and educational campaign.

Marches, petitions and press conferences have all focused attention on the abuses suffered by ex-patrollers. The small office in Quiche acts as a drop-in centre to which anyone with a human-rights problem can go for help. Mendez himself, with the help of bilingual members of the executive, conducts a Wesleyan-style campaign to educate the rural highlanders in their constitutional rights. I sat one Saturday morning in Jojobaj in northern Quiche, in a streamer-bedecked village hall, while some thirty widows and forty campesinos listened to Mendez. His presentation included a somewhat idiosyncratic history of the development of the concept of human rights, touching on the French Revolution, Abraham Lincoln, two world wars, the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There was a detailed question-and-answer session on the Guatemalan Constitution. The whole was interspersed with cajolery, encouragement and frequent biblical references: 'Next week bring your pencils... look at Jesus carrying the cross, every time he fell down he got up... don't forget you are the majority in Guatemala. The audience responded in kind: 'We're not afraid of the army if they



kill us. They are more afraid of us', an old woman in a magnificent flame-coloured skirt replied. Membership of CERJ now stands at ten thousand. Almost ninety communities have at least partially ended patrolling. Of course, this has not been done without cost.

This brings me back to Mrs Mejia. Her murder was almost certainly due to the fact that her son was an active member of CERJ, while she was a member of CONAVIGUA, a widows' self-help group. Juan, her son, who was out of the house at the time, had frequently been threatened since giving up patrolling. Since CERJ's foundation, five members have disappeared, kidnapped by the army; one has been killed after being warned against participating; while Mendez has received repeated death threats, including a bolt of black cloth hung on the back of his door, and attempts to run his car off the road. In addition, the army has mounted a disinformation campaign, travelling to villages to warn against participation in CERJ, which, it claims, collaborates with the guerrillas. Videos are shown of a wolf in a chicken coop talking about human rights; he persuades the chicks to follow him, and then eats them. Another shows an alleged guerrilla defector denouncing Mendez as a guerrilla commander. The army admits it has no evidence for this accusation, but in conversation with me, General Gramajo insisted that CERJ was a 'facade organization ... whose aims, strategies and objectives are the same as the guerrillas.' Many villagers are intimidated by such campaigns; and the result, as Mendez explained, is to divide the community. 'Indigenous communities have always been cooperative, it was not their function to provide the army and police; that is the job of the army and police. Now if you are not in a patrol you are against the army. Any kind of pluralism—church, trade union, women's group—is subversive ... all this in the name of anti-communism.' He also explained how the patrols had subverted the traditional authority structure in Mayan communities. 'Now people know that the only way to get something done is to go to the local military commander. They don't like it, but they are realists.'

The events that followed Mrs Mejia's death in Parraxtut were a clear example of this divisiveness. After the murder, the patrollers organized a village meeting at which the family was denounced as subversive, and it was claimed that Mrs Mejia had been killed by guerrillas. In the following days, members of the extended family were repeatedly threatened by the commissioners; one cousin, Victoria, told how they tried to break down her door in the middle of the night and she was only saved by her dog frightening them away, giving her time to flee. By the end of the week ten adults and eleven children had taken refuge in the CERJ office. The military commander of the local base said he could only help if the family ended its involvement in human-rights groups. On 27 March, Alvarez Guadamuz, the deputy human-rights ombudsman, arrived to escort the family back to their homes. He was accompanied by the ombudsman for the province, Mendez, army officers and two policemen with warrants for the arrest of the military commissioners who had killed Mrs Mejia. When they arrived in Parraxtut, Mendez was immediately surrounded by gun-toting patrollers shouting that they had orders to kill him. Guadamuz

intervened, allowing Mendez and the family to escape. Whereupon, according to the ombudsman from Quiche, 'We were surrounded. They threatened us with sticks and machetes, fired rifles into the air; I thought we were going to die.' The patrollers were not interested in a discussion of the family's rights. The army had disappeared and the police were powerless. Somehow the ombudsmen escaped. This incident received considerably more press coverage than Mrs Mejia's murder. De Leon Carpio declared that the patrols were out of control, and some members of Congress called for their abolition. These denunciations ignored the fact that the whole incident, according to eye witnesses, was organized by soldiers who had come to Parraxtut earlier in the day.

### The Bureaucratization of Human Rights

The incident also exposed the ineffectiveness of the human-rights bureaucracy set up by Cerezo in 1986. The organization's ombudsman has the responsibility of investigating human-rights violations, publicly reporting his findings and initiating court proceedings. Deputies are located in each region and the ombudsman in Quiche insists—even after Parraxtut—that their presence has put a brake on the worst excesses. However, in spite of a mandate to protect life and provide security, the deputies have no coercive powers and cannot compel the police or judiciary to act. Moreover, De Leon Carpio has taken an ambiguous position on the patrols, defending their constitutional right to 'free' association and stating, in a public forum on the issue, that denunciations of coercion had not been proved. 'Reality has now jumped up at them', commented Edmundo Vasquez Martinez, President of the Supreme Court, when I discussed the matter with him in early April. He feels that the concept of human rights has been 'mystified and bureaucratized... it creates false expectations so that people don't come to the proper organs.' He is adamant that the patrols currently represent one of the major human-rights problems; together with the army, they often have more power than the judiciary who are unarmed and unable to carry out their function. He would like to see a system where the investigation of crimes is not done by the justices of the peace but by an independent prosecution office.

In the meantime, Mrs Mejia's killers retained their liberty, and the family remained in the CERY office. A delegation of patrollers from Parraxtut went to Guatemala City to make a very public apology to Guadamuz, but reports from the village stated that a few days later the same patrollers held another meeting in which they stated their view that the family could only return if the men started patrolling and they all renounced their membership of popular movements. General Gramajo told me that the killers were not military commissioners and that the patrollers had been provoked by 'collaborators of subversives' (the Mejia family) who were also manipulating the human-rights ombudsman. As far as he was concerned, the failure of the rule of law was due to the weakness and corruption of the judiciary, to whom the army and police were only complementary. In the weeks following these events, the family

reluctantly returned to their homes, where they continue to live in fear of their lives. The military commissioners have not been arrested. Two more leaders of CERJ have been murdered: Jose Vicente Garcia and Jose Maria Ixcaya.

The human-rights situation is exacerbated by crises on every other front. The guerrillas, under the auspices of the National Revolutionary Guatemalan Union (URNG), are negotiating in Norway with the National Commission for Reconciliation, and direct negotiations with the government are on the agenda. Yet at the same time their military activity has increased. General Gramajo's claim that they are an insignificant fighting force whose importance is exaggerated by the press looks increasingly strange in the light of aerial bombardments of guerrilla positions, repeated army-guerrilla clashes in various parts of the country, and a 'virtual state of war' in the village of Santa Maria de Jesus, some twenty kilometres from the capital, where three children were killed in crossfire between army and guerrillas. The URNG argues its right to continue armed struggle until 'the very last stage of negotiations,' as 'the problems which precipitated the armed struggle continue to exist.' Cerezo appears tacitly to accept this, as negotiations have not been discontinued.

In terms of social conditions, there is little to show for four years of civilian rule. A measles epidemic has so far claimed 1,333 lives, calling into question the government's claim of 80 per cent compliance in its vaccination campaign. In March and April a number of public hospitals had to close for lack of basic supplies—this in a country where a current estimate is one hospital bed for every 723 people. Schools are still hopelessly overcrowded and underequipped. The situation was so bad in one school that the parents took the teachers hostage, and the teachers then joined the occupation in solidarity. Approximately 2.3 million children do not attend school at all.

The economic situation, however, is currently causing the most unrest. Financial speculation, gross corruption and the government's incompetence have resulted in the quetzal plummeting in value, and a rapid rise in the cost of living, creating enormous hardship. The CUC (Committee for Peasant Unity) estimate that 16 quetzals a day is the minimum required to meet a family's basic needs. None of my Indian friends earn more than 3 quetzals a day (worth less than 75 US cents at the end of April—not enough to cover the bus fare from Quiche to Guatemala City in order to go and protest). Roblez is convinced that the increase in repression this spring was deliberately timed to terrorize the people out of protesting against the price rises. If so, the policy was unsuccessful. In April, unions, teachers and students all protested against the removal of the subsidy on fuel. Cerezo responded that the popular movements were provoking instability and damaging the democratic system.

It seems unlikely that the violence will decrease in the run-up to the presidential elections in November. General Gramajo suggested I take comfort from the fact that it was not as bad as previous election years. Yet he himself expressed anxiety at the destabilizing effect of

former military dictator Rios Montt's attempt to run as a presidential candidate. It is unconstitutional for those put in power by means of a coup, as Rios Montt was, to run. 'His followers want to emphasize the instability of the country, so that if he is not allowed to run, they can stage a coup d'état.' Rios Montt, with his slogan of 'Security, welfare and justice', presents himself as the law-and-order candidate. It was under his regime in 1982-1983 that some of the worst rural massacres took place, yet he is running second in the opinion polls to conservative newspaper owner Jorge Carpio. This bears out Dr Villagran Kramer's gloomy view that 'the army's handling of the Indian problem through oppression and fear is not necessarily applauded, but is nonetheless accepted tacitly as the best method; it produces the best dividends with minor costs.' The liberal sector that might have opposed the policy was virtually destroyed in the early 1980s. Consequently 'there is no effective political organization in this country that could in one way or the other challenge the Right.' Certainly all the presidential candidates are to the right of the feud-ridden Christian Democrats, whose own candidate Cabrera is tarnished by associations with the drug trade. None of them touch what Mendez sees as the three key issues for the country: demilitarization, land reform and the marginalization and exploitation of ethnic peoples. Villagran Kramer criticizes the popular movements for not fielding their own candidates. 'The union leadership have been indoctrinated with a theory of apolitical activity; because if you were "political" you were communist.'

### Forces for Change

Mendez and Roblez reject this analysis, arguing that in Guatemala's current political climate it is grassroots organizing and the actions of the international community that hold out the most hope of achieving political change. The popular movements are becoming increasingly coordinated. Over the last two years the human-rights groups and trade unions have formed a coalition called the Union of Syndical and Popular Movements (UASP). This provides the opportunity to formulate common positions, and enables predominantly rural groups like CONAVIGUA to make use of the space and facilities of city-based trade unions. The coalition is committed to social change by constitutional and non-violent means.

The Church is also playing an increasingly active and interventionist role. In January it set up its own human-rights office. This year's communique from the Catholic bishops' conference was extremely forthright. It stated for example: 'Human rights, such as the right to dignity and equality, do not exist. Such is the case of selective military recruitment, applied only to Indians and Campesinos, while others are left untouched... In Guatemalan society a man is considered an instrument of production, an object of service, a rival to overcome... Once again we must point to the traditional structure of a minority that accumulates wealth and privilege while the impoverished majority lacks food, health, education and reasonably paid labour... The arbitrary increase in the cost of living, especially of the most basic goods, the shortage of products caused by hoarding, is a grave sin

with no justification whatsoever... Every free and conscious action that endangers the life of our fellow man is immoral and totally opposes the will of God.'

Perhaps the most hopeful development is that thanks to the efforts of groups like CONAVIGUA and CEBJ, rural Guatemalans are themselves beginning to believe in their rights to organize and to live a decent life. My friend Maria is twenty-eight. Her husband, father and brothers were murdered by the army in the early 1980s. She was raped by twenty-five soldiers. She taught herself to read, write and speak Spanish. She now lives with her three children and mother, growing corn and earning 1 quetzal a day by carrying wood on her back for three hours to market. She belongs to CONAVIGUA and goes to Mendez's human-rights classes. She always carries two books in her bag: the Guatemalan Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A few weeks ago, a civil patroller accosted her on the path to town and told her that he had warned her before not to leave the village or she might suffer. She pulled out her Guatemalan Constitution and brandished it at him, saying 'Look here, in this book it says we're all equal and I am free to go where I like. So you can clear off.' And he did.

# Collets International Shop

*Possibly the world's most interesting bookshop*

***British books, journals and pamphlets;  
fiction, languages, politics, economics,  
social sciences, trade union, travel, peace  
and green movements. World famous  
stockist of USSR and East  
European books, journals,  
language cassettes, videos;  
CDs, records, music cassettes,  
posters, badges, cards, T-shirts  
and much more.***



129-131 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EQ. Tel: (071) 734 0782/3

# DISCERNING

## THE VAMPIRE OF REASON An Essay in the Philosophy of History

Richard James Blackburn

This lucid and expansive study ranges among Darwinian natural science and Hegelian and Marxist philosophy, medieval history and the cosmic speculations of the Vedas, to explore the dialectic of creation and destruction underlying human history, and to argue the place of nature in a concept of reason.

£10.95/US\$18.95 paper 0 86091 972 2  
£32.95/US\$60.00 hardback 0 86091 257 4

## ANTI-CHRIST IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Revised Edition

Christopher Hill

One of Britain's most distinguished historians reconstructs the significance of the prophesied Beast during this period of religious and political radicalism, looking at the uses of a subversive imagery to skilfully elaborate the connections between Puritanism, dissent and revolution.

£9.95/US\$16.95 paper 0 86091 997 8

## DISCOURSES OF EXTREMITY Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances

Norman Geras

Arguing on two fronts, Geras measures the moral claims of Marxist theory against those of liberal and libertarian thought on crucial questions of social and material justice; and defends its capacity for political analysis against the discourse-based perspective of 'post-Marxism'.

£9.95/US\$16.95 paper 0 86091 980 3  
£24.95/US\$45.00 hardback 0 86091 268 3

## LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Norberto Bobbio

Bobbio's elegant work studies the related development of these key terms of Western philosophy, from classical thought via such figures as Mill and Tocqueville to modern socialist and neo-liberal political theory, providing an invaluable and succinct introduction to the central concerns and concepts of the subject.

£9.95/US\$14.95 paper 0 86091 985 4  
£24.95/US\$45.00 hardback 0 86091 268 8

INTELLIGENT DISCERNING  
RADICAL INTERNATIONAL  
OPEN-MINDED INDEPENDENT



UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR.  
USA: 29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001-2291.

## Western Economic Diplomacy and the New Eastern Europe

Hobbes once remarked that if you are forced at gunpoint to go through a door, you are still free to go through it: you can be forced and be free. For most of us today this is a perversity that smacks of Stalinism. But what if someone throws walls around you on three sides and then leaves you to decide for yourself what to do? Are you still free to determine your future, assuming that the wall builder has at least as much right to build the walls as you do? Issues of this sort come to mind from a study of current Western economic policy towards the new regimes in Eastern Europe. But unfortunately most conventional discussion of the topic either fails to spot the walls or assumes that they are natural structures deriving from the very substance of market economics, rather than the work of political hands. As a result, conventional wisdom does not for a moment doubt that the peoples of Eastern Europe have at last entered the realm of freedom and self-determination. The following survey of West-East economic diplomacy suggests that while the people of Eastern Europe may have rid themselves

of Hobbes's freedom, the world they are entering is not adequately captured by such notions as political sovereignty and self-determination; markets as free spaces liberated from politics; and Western diplomacy as the spirit of liberalism abroad.<sup>1</sup>

### East-West Economic Relations before the Regime Changes

The unstated premiss of most of the news about current East-West economic relations is that the West has had little or nothing to do with Eastern Europe in the past. So we are left with one definition of the situation: a beginning of relations, a start of help; and one problem to debate: is the help enough? In reality, of course, the West had a complex and highly structured economic relationship with Eastern Europe before the summer of 1989, albeit a predominantly conflictual one. To appreciate today's new policies, we must very briefly remind ourselves of this background.

The relationship embraced the following elements: (1) An embargo on exports to Eastern Europe organized through Cocom, a body without legal status, but no less effective for that, run from the basement of the US embassy in Paris; while publicly presented as a system of sanctions against the export of military technology to the Warsaw Pact, it was, in fact, a generalized instrument of technological warfare, covering half of all items traded on the world economy. Western states which broke this export blockade would be punished by the USA. (2) A system of tariffs, quotas (quantitative limitations) and outright bans on imports of a very wide range of goods from the Warsaw Pact countries to the EC and other Western states. (3) Some limited trade and cooperation agreements between the EC and individual East European states, notably Romania and, in 1988, Hungary. These allowed more favourable treatment of imports to the EC, though by no means removing the very substantial barriers. They also, particularly in the case of the pioneering Hungarian agreement, gave special rights to EC companies in these countries. There was also an industrial trade agreement with Czechoslovakia, mainly to allow certain Czech exports wanted by the EC to enter the Community. (4) Poland, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia, as members of the IMF and the World Bank, were already to an extent subject to invigilation by these strategic financial institutions. (5) All the East European countries, with the exception of Romania and to a lesser extent Czechoslovakia, were heavily indebted to Western governments and private banks. The heaviest debt burdens were those of Poland (now \$41 billion) and Hungary (now \$11 billion). This debt burden had started to accumulate in the 1970s at a time when Cocom controls and import barriers had been to some degree relaxed, only to be reimposed with new severity at the start of the 1980s. (6) Against this general background, there had been a consistent Western policy since the early 1970s of insisting on the establishment of bilateral relations between the EC and Western states on the one hand, and

---

<sup>1</sup> This article will examine only the policy towards Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and, briefly, the USSR, and will exclude Yugoslavia, Albania and the GDR.



individual Comecon countries on the other, in the field of economic relations. The West, in other words, never accepted multilateral links between Comecon and the EC. Linked to this was a determination on the West's part to discriminate between the East European countries according to the responsiveness of each to Western political objectives in the region. At first these objectives were primarily in the military-diplomatic field, and Romania was singled out for special treatment. But during the 1980s the criterion for discrimination has become the degree of openness to the capitalist world in domestic economic arrangements. (7) There was finally the military confrontation. The International Institute of Strategic Studies in London maintained throughout the 1980s that there existed a rough parity of ground, air and sea forces in the European theatre. This meant that the military drain on resources took a far heavier toll in the Warsaw Pact than in the West for the simple reason that gross domestic product in those states was far smaller than GDP in the West—probably about one third the size.

### Political Actors and Historic Choices

This catalogue demonstrates that economic relations between the Comecon states and the world capitalist market were, and are, governed by political institutions in the West. The key political actors in this field are, of course, the Western states themselves, the governments of the OECD countries—most importantly the United States and West Germany. But these foreign offices and finance ministries decide such matters in conclave in a number of multilateral institutions with a seemingly non-political role. This illusion is sustained by the fact that the public spokespeople for these bodies are not the leaders of states at all, but international civil-servant types who command few column inches in the press, while the intergovernmental battles within the institutions remain for the most part shrouded in secrecy.

The overall gatekeeping body is the IMF and its sister organization, the World Bank, in both of which the USA has an ultimately controlling voice. No significant new policy departures towards Eastern Europe that involve financial questions are supposed to occur without first receiving the IMF's seal of approval for the given East European state's eligibility. Similarly, the USA has an ultimately controlling voice in Cocom. The main institutional forum for policy discussion and harmonization across the whole field of economic relations with Eastern Europe is the OECD, otherwise known as the 'Group of 24' (G24). But the OECD is an intergovernmental discussion forum rather than a political actor, and therefore, last summer, it delegated the authority to implement Western trade and aid policy toward Eastern Europe to the EC Commission. Flanking the Commission are two intergovernmental banks: the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the newly established European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The latter, proposed by the French government before the Strasbourg EC summit of December 1989 (whose constitution was signed in the spring of 1990), will not be fully

operative until autumn 1991. Finally, the EC itself retains jurisdiction over trade and cooperation policy towards Eastern Europe on the part of the Twelve.

It is through these bodies that the relationship of the East European states to the world economy is decided. It is important to stress that the degree to which any state-trading countries are integrated into the institutions of the world market is not, in fact, primarily a technical issue but a political one: there are no insuperable technical obstacles to a Comecon-type economy participating fully in these institutions, as Western governments have shown in their treatment of China in the 1980s. In the words of the 1984 Hindley Report on behalf of the EC's Committee on External Relations concerning relations with China: 'The development of relations between the Community and China . . . shows that different economic systems are not a major hindrance to close economic and political relations, provided that there is sufficient political will on both sides.'<sup>2</sup>

The political transformations in Eastern Europe last year have presented the West with one great issue of principle and another of strategy. The question of principle is this: what should be the basis for ending the state of economic warfare towards Eastern Europe—political democratization, or a capitalist social transformation? If democracy was the West's principle, these states could have been welcomed into the world economy by now, regardless of the continuing non-capitalist character of their economic and social systems. And the strategic issue has been: should the West seek to use its immensely powerful resources for economic pressure in order to pursue objectives within the new East European states; and if so, what should these objectives be? Up until now, however, a technicist cloak has been thrown over open debate about these enormously important questions; above all by handling them within and through the multilateral organizations described. Felix Rohatyn, the influential New York banker from Lazard Freres, writing in the EC's house journal *Europe* in January, stated clearly the political case for Western governments to handle policy towards Eastern Europe through such multilateral bodies: 'Economic institutions, especially ones that are considered politically benign and not political in nature, by being multinational, by being "neutral", and whose efforts are perceived as having improved well-being among recipients . . . can ask for changes as part of an economic development programme' that other more patently partisan bodies could not easily demand. He goes on: 'The multinational structures that operate between the private and public sectors can be a very useful buffer and negotiator for a lot of things that are going to have to be done.'<sup>3</sup> Before examining these issues in more detail, it is worth considering here briefly another remarkable example of this technicist muffling of debate: that concerning the West's supposed support for the Gorbachev administration in the USSR.

---

<sup>2</sup> PE Doc. A-2 74/85, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Europe*, January–February 1990.

## Helping Gorbachev Defeat Gorbachevism

There seems to be universal agreement not only that the Cold War has ended over the last twelve months, but that the Bush Administration is doing everything it can to help the current Soviet leadership. Yet all the key barriers to Soviet involvement in the world economy remain in place, despite promises of minor relaxations at the Bush-Gorbachev summit in Washington.

Gorbachev has for five years been attempting to gain Western support for his policy of political relaxation and domestic economic restructuring, but his goal has been to rebuild the Soviet economy on a non-capitalist basis. He has also hoped to regain influence within Eastern Europe, and preserve a regional trading bloc there, albeit on an entirely new basis. Gorbachev's strategy has been to use his enormous political following in the West to gain the kind of economic concessions that would revive the Soviet economy and achieve these objectives. Western counter-strategy was set in place at the 1987 Venice summit of the Group of Seven. They agreed upon a rhetoric of support for Gorbachev, combined with a policy of continued blockade and economic warfare. The US government's actual policy has been summarized by the *Financial Times*'s Peter Riddell: 'There is a strong feeling in Washington, both in Congress and the Administration, that providing assistance which would shore up the existing economic structure would be money wasted, and that the USA should wait for moves towards a free-market system.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus the Cocom list is to be stringently maintained against exports to the USSR. The G24 package of measures for Eastern Europe specifically excludes the USSR until it adopts, in the words of the EC Commissioner in charge of the programme, the 'economic preconditions of democracy'. The EC has also made a point of ruling out the possibility that the USSR may be offered an Association Agreement. What's more, the agreement establishing the EBRD specifically prohibits the USSR from borrowing significant amounts of money from the new bank for the next three years. And so on.

The one area where it seemed the US Administration might be flexible was in the field of US-Soviet trade: the Administration has been under a great deal of pressure from those sections of US capital strongly interested in the Soviet market, and it has genuine fears about losing the battle for this prize to West German business. Therefore, at the Malta summit in December 1989, Bush indicated that the USSR would probably be granted Most Favoured Nation Status (MFN) at the June summit and would also be allowed to gain observer status at GATT. In fact, in June the USA rejected the granting of MFN status, and the trade pact signed there is of little or no economic significance to the USSR. The tariff barriers continue, involving an overall 45 per cent tariff on Soviet exports where they are not banned outright. Clearly, sweeping embargoes on exports to the

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Financial Times*, 29 March 1990.

USSR have enormous consequences for Gorbachev's domestic economic and political options.<sup>5</sup>

The trade pact's main provisions are for granting US companies the same rights in the USSR that they enjoy in Western countries: respect for patents and copyright, guarantees against discrimination, faster accreditation, rights to media access for advertising and to carry out market research, and so on. All this was one of the preconditions for the USA granting MFN status to the USSR. Otherwise, the pact simply sets up information on US agricultural products available for Soviet purchase, and on Soviet agricultural-product needs for US agribusiness. And even this deal required a prior threat from the Soviet side of blocking the renewal of their grain contract with the USA before Bush agreed to sign.<sup>6</sup>

### Old Controls and New

We will next examine first the degree to which the West has so far been prepared to relax the controls carried over from the earlier period, and then look at what may be described as the positive initiatives of the West towards the new governments. Although one might have assumed that with the arrival of new democratic regimes in Eastern Europe, the old Cold War controls would have been dismantled by the West as a matter of course, this has not, in fact, happened. Indeed new barriers are being erected to deny the Comecon countries access to the resources of the multilateral institutions of the Western economic system. To gain the easing of these controls and the lifting of the barriers, governments in Eastern Europe must embark on a *domestic social transformation* of a scope not seen since the Sovietization of the region in the late 1940s.

The West's exclusionary policy towards the East European states' involvement in the international trading system has not been scrapped. We will look first at exports to Eastern Europe, and then at imports from Eastern Europe.

After very acrimonious debates between the USA and various West European states, especially the FRG, the Cocom countries seem ready to cut by about half, the number of goods blocked from export to Eastern Europe. The USA seems ready to relax the technological blockade against East European countries, as opposed to the USSR; but only if the former allow the USA to police their economies to ensure that the extra liberalized goods are not subsequently re-exported to the USSR. But we should note that Cocom remains very much alive, and the East European states are still far from being able to participate fully in the world capitalist economy as far as imports from the West are concerned. And there is no intention whatever to abolish Cocom.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Trade liberalization faces strong opposition within both the Administration and Congress, fuelled by the military-industrial complex. Bush failed to consult his Senate Financial Committee before making his trade offer to Gorbachev in Malta.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Financial Times*, 19 March 1990.

<sup>7</sup> *The Financial Times* reported on 4 June 1990 that 'the West is more united than ever over the need to retain the shadowy Co-ordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (Cocom).'

One of the most urgent ways in which the West could help the new states of Eastern Europe would be to actually apply the liberal international trade principles it preaches: in other words by ending all blocks and embargoes on imports from Eastern Europe. This would not, according to the neoclassical economics of the capitalist market, be an act of altruism, but an efficiency measure for Western Europe itself. Yet no such full trade liberalization has taken place. To illustrate this, we can take the most liberal trade agreement so far reached with any East European country: that with Poland ratified in October 1989 between the EC and the new Solidarity government of Prime Minister Mazowiecki. Instead of swiftly opening the EC to exports from the debt-strangled Polish economy, the Treaty commits the EC only to 'remove or liberalize the quantitative restrictions it applies to Polish exports by 31 December 1994 at the latest, *subject to exceptions*.' Furthermore, Article Three of the Treaty makes clear that products covered by the European Coal and Steel Community will not be included in the liberalization measures: in other words Poland's coal and steel exports will still be restricted. Article Four indicates that textile restrictions will also continue to apply. As to the extent of the embargo on Polish exports to the EC after 1994, this will be decided through negotiations between Poland and the EC in that year. The terms of the EC's trade agreement with Poland and Hungary are hopelessly restrictive for both these heavily debt-burdened states, desperate to increase their export earnings. Hungary's current-account deficit with the West in 1989, the first year of operation of the trade agreement negotiated in 1988, totalled \$1.4 billion. At the start of 1990, the EC granted Poland and Hungary its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)—concessions the EC offers to Third World countries enabling them to export to the EC on slightly better terms than OECD countries like the USA and Japan; but GSP does not extend to items barred or subject to quotas, and therefore does not allow free trade in key sectors like agriculture, steel, textiles or coal. And furthermore, GSP has been granted for only one year, to be renewed or revoked at the start of 1991.<sup>8</sup>

### The Debt Burden

Hungary and Poland have been the two states most heavily in debt to Western institutions. Poland has borrowed some \$48 billion from the West, has paid off some \$39 billion and is left with a total debt of some \$41 billion. Hungary holds debt of over \$14 billion for a population of only 10.5 million people. Bulgaria, also heavily indebted to the tune of about \$11 billion, is the only East European state officially and unilaterally to suspend repayments of principal on its debt. Czechoslovakia's \$6 billion debt is small in relation to its economic capacity, and its credit rating in the West is the highest of all the East European economies; while Romania, at enormous cost to domestic living standards, has paid off all significant debts to the West.

Poland and Hungary are not only the most heavily indebted Comecon

---

<sup>8</sup> Commission of the European Community, 'EC-East Europe Relations', Update, 29 May 1990, External Relations X.ICC/A, p. 7.

states; they were also the first to commit themselves to a capitalist future with a liberal-democratic polity. Most of their debt is owed to public rather than private bodies in the West; for example, only \$9 billion of Poland's \$41 billion debt is owed to private sector banks. Therefore no one in the West would suffer in any significant way if this debt, for long an overwhelming constraint on initiatives to drag these economies out of their crises, were cancelled.

An obvious policy for the West, then, would have been to write off a very large chunk of this public debt, or at least draw up a comprehensive and radical rescheduling package. There are ample precedents for such a response. Even the British government has in the last few years written off £1 billion worth of Third World debt owed to Britain. And the debt had, after all, been incurred by the old, Communist regime—there was now a new democratic start. It is a unique situation and thus ideological precedents need not have been a serious political embarrassment to Western governments.

Yet no such exercise in what the bankers call 'debt forgiveness' has taken place. Not a single dollar of Poland's or Hungary's debts have been written off. Furthermore, the rescheduling agreed for Poland has been extremely limited in its time frame; Hungary's debt is not being tackled—rescheduling of the debt does not appear to be on the agenda. At the beginning of February, Polish Prime Minister Mazowiecki demanded from members of the European Parliament in Brussels that Poland should be freed entirely from its need to make debt repayments; he also urged that Poland's creditors should considerably reduce the debt burden itself. On 16 February, the Group of 24 agreed that Poland could stop any payments of principal (the original sum borrowed) or interest on debts owed to Western public bodies, till March 1991. They also asked the private-sector banks to follow suit as far as interest was concerned. But the interest owed has not been cancelled; it will be repaid over a fourteen-year period. G24 also agreed to reschedule \$3.4 billion of arrears, built up by the end of 1989.<sup>9</sup> The Hungarian government has not felt itself strong enough to demand a debt moratorium.<sup>10</sup>

Western public policy on the debt issue has been geared to both avoiding a crippling breakdown of the Polish and Hungarian economies in the short term, and maintaining the full weight of the long-term debt burden. There is one great advantage in having a debt noose around weak countries: you can control them politically, above all by making them desperate for roll-over credits and bridging loans, which in turn require them to negotiate terms with the IMF and other Western financial institutions. That indeed is the only explanation for the current policy towards Poland and Hungary.

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Financial Times*, 23 February 1990.

<sup>10</sup> According to Dr Peter Balazs, Director-General of the Hungarian Ministry of Trade, the government desperately wants a rescheduling agreement as a minimum measure, but knows that any public demand for this would provoke a catastrophic financial crisis caused by a flight of Western capital (Paper presented to Europe House Seminar, 29 June 1990). Hungary has proceeded much further than other East European states down the road to an open financial market. The political system is therefore uniquely vulnerable to losses of confidence on the part of Western capital.

High levels of debt, acute shortages of hard currency, and the continued barriers to free trade with the West, make the search for exports all the more urgent, and the bottlenecks caused by an inability to secure key imports all the more acute. One way round this problem is counter-trade: various forms of barter, involving agreements to exchange a given volume of East European exports for an agreed equivalent of imports from the West. This form of East-West trade has traditionally been quite common, amounting to more than 30 per cent of East-West trade in the early 1980s; and while the West was never keen on this method—for ideological reasons and because it may enable Third World countries to lessen their dependence on Western financial bodies—they were quite ready to tolerate it. But not any more. Western governments have made it very clear that they now want this trading arrangement to stop, and have sought agreement from East European governments to end the practice. Thus the EC's September 1989 Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Poland specifically binds the Polish government not to seek to promote counter-trade. The effect of this new policy is take from the East European governments one means of escape from a position of total dependence on the political institutions of Western financial management.

### The IMF's New Terms for Opening the Gate

It has, of course, never been a legal requirement for countries to have capitalist economies in order to join or do business with the IMF. There are two key criteria for membership: what is the country's foreign-policy alignment? Can it supply adequate statistical information about its economy? Some East European states have been members of the IMF for a decade or more: notably Ceausescu's Romania, Kadar's Hungary and Poland. At various times they required IMF involvement in order to handle their international financial problems, and at no time did the IMF remotely consider making social transformation to capitalism any sort of precondition for allowing access to Western funds. But with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, all that has changed: commitments to concrete steps down the capitalist road are now a *sine qua non* of IMF approval for the release of new funds from Western public institutions. In other words, a new and very tough hurdle has been placed before the governments and peoples of Eastern Europe. Without a clean bill of health from the IMF, access to other Western multilateral agencies is barred.

The IMF's preferred mode of operation is to engage in a period of negotiation with the government concerned over the latter's domestic economic and social strategy. The outcome of these negotiations is a letter of intent from the East European government, followed by an eventual approval of the package by the IMF's Executive Board. The IMF then gives the go-ahead for other Western institutions to offer loans and investment projects to the government concerned. This has been the pattern both in the case of Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1989 and in Poland's case in December 1989. Thus Poland drew up its so-called Balcerowicz Plan in collaboration with the IMF, then presented it to the organization in the form of a letter of intent at the end of

1989, and it had to be formally approved at the IMF Executive Board meeting on 4 February. At the same time, the IMF arranged a standby credit with Poland at the start of the year, and this was the signal opening the way for other international loans and for World Bank lending. The IMF has been locked in debate with the Hungarian government over similar arrangements throughout the first half of 1990, and in the spring of 1990 IMF teams began discussion with Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria about their membership while also renewing dialogue after a long period of hostility towards Romania, a long-time IMF member. The Hungary-IMF negotiations in the early part of this year throw light on the type of disputes that can take place. Up until the spring elections in Hungary, the government was locked in disagreement with the IMF. The direct issue was a modest loan of £200 million, but until this was settled with the IMF, Hungary was not allowed to take up a further \$1 billion loan from the European Community. The IMF loan was made conditional upon the government ending the cheap rents that most Hungarians pay for their homes. Rent subsidies therefore had to go. The government resisted, the IMF insisted; the government introduced a bill in the Hungarian Parliament ending subsidies, the MPs threw it out. So the IMF refused to agree terms.<sup>11</sup>

### The Diplomacy of Social Engineering

Given the terrible debt burden still dominating countries like Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, new lending for infrastructure development and further investment is extremely hard to come by. Since the regime changes of 1989, the credit rating of all the East European countries has declined, with private-sector Western banks holding back from involvement in Eastern Europe unless given legal guarantees by the governments concerned that such private finance will be insured in hard currency against risk of loss. Thus East European governments are pushed towards obtaining new Western loans from the public sector. It should be understood that what the West is offering is not something unusual, but simply the normal battery of instruments available to players in the world economy—stand-by credits, loans, infrastructure projects and aid. What is new is the scale of the social engineering objectives linked to these instruments in the East European case.<sup>12</sup>

In February 1990 the World Bank announced it would lend \$5 billion to Eastern Europe (excluding Czechoslovakia, which is too advanced to qualify) over the next three years; half of this total being earmarked for Poland. But the Bank's president, Mr Barber Conable, made clear

<sup>11</sup> *The Financial Times*, 23 February 1990.

<sup>12</sup> Also new is the institutional framework for carrying it through: the role of the EC and the potential future role of the EBRD—the first major multilateral institution not effectively controlled by the US. It is also true that the quantitative scale of the funds available may be larger than that on offer to most Third World countries. Whether this new focus on Eastern Europe is at the same time draining funds commensurately away from the Third World is a topic of debate. In any case, we should bear in mind the fact that Eastern Europe is by far the biggest investment opportunity on offer to the West's private capital since postwar reconstruction.



that this money 'will focus on restructuring all facets of the economy and market-oriented change', and he underlined that the World Bank was working for a new system in Eastern Europe 'vesting economic decision-making in the individual and in private enterprise'. Specifically, Mr Conable wants to open up the East European economies to Western trade and investment, and wants legislation and institutions there for free markets, for bankruptcies and for unemployment.<sup>13</sup> East European governments need not apply unless they accept these terms.

The same bottom line for new agreements of all sorts with Eastern Europe has been adopted by the EC. The EC plays three distinct but overlapping roles in current economic diplomacy towards the East. On the one hand, its institutions speak for the twelve member states in the traditional fields of EC competence; above all, trade and economic cooperation agreements with non-members. But on the other hand, since the summer of 1989, the EC Commission has been made into an executive agency acting on behalf of the Group of 24, the OECD countries. The third dimension of EC involvement will be through the preponderant stake held by the twelve members in the new EBRD. In its purely EC role, the Community is offering loans from both the European Investment Bank and from the European Coal and Steel Community, to be guaranteed by the EC budget. But the Commission is revising the formal framework of such credits to link them, as far as Eastern Europe is concerned, to backing 'market oriented reforms'.<sup>14</sup>

The Commission had hoped that the European Investment Bank (EIB), an EC institution, would be a major player in East European investment projects. In 1989, EIB was authorized to lend ECU 1 billion to Poland and Hungary over a three-year period. Initially money is being focused on transport projects in Poland and telecommunications in Hungary, but EIB had been planning also to lend to other sectors in these countries. The President of EIB, Mr Ernst-Gunther Broder, saw its role as concentrating on infrastructure projects, while accepting that these must be geared to assisting the private sector's growth in the countries concerned. But the EIB is to be phased out of East European business because of hostility from a number of states, above all the USA.<sup>15</sup>

Another direct EC field is in the signing of Economic Cooperation Agreements with individual East European states, usually as part of general trade agreements, as discussed above. The economic cooperation part of the agreement with Poland is the paradigm of EC policy in this field. The September agreement with Poland declares that it is directed to 'supporting structural changes in the Polish economy'—in

---

<sup>13</sup> *The Financial Times*, 23 February 1990.

<sup>14</sup> EC Commission Communication, 1 February 1990.

<sup>15</sup> The US government sees the EIB, over which it has no direct control, as a direct challenger to the World Bank, which it does control, as the leading institution for infrastructure development. Part of the price paid to the Americans for the creation of the EBRD seems to have been the phasing out of the EIB's East European work.

other words, privatization. Meanwhile, Poland must agree to a series of liberalization measures: there must be no discrimination against EC companies in the granting of import licences for goods entering Poland; no discrimination against EC companies operating in Poland over the giving out of hard currency to pay for imports. Help must be provided for EC firms wishing to establish themselves in Poland, and international invitations to tender for contracts must be offered to EC firms (Article 16). Poland must help Western firms with 'investment promotion and protection, including the transfer of profits and repatriation of capital' (Article 18). To round off its effort, the EC will be offering 'vocational training', which turns out to be training for 'executives, instructors, managers and students' linked to the vital need for 'economic reform', which is 'especially urgent' in the fields of banking and finance. A similar agreement was signed with Hungary in 1988, and the Commission expects such trade and economic cooperation agreements to be signed with Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia by the end of this year.

### 'Operation Phare'

The Group of 24 Western states decided on 1 August 1989 to empower the EC Commission to coordinate aid for Eastern Europe. At that stage the aid was to be limited to Poland and Hungary. On 26 September the Commission presented its Action Plan to the second coordinating meeting of the Group of 24. The plan is known as 'Operation Phare' (acronym for 'Poland, Hungary: Assistance for Economic Restructuring'). The plan envisaged a total of some ECU 600 million for 1990, of which 200 million will come from the EC budget, 100 million from individual EC member states, and the remaining 300 million from other G24 members. But the EC documents reveal that this is not money for the Hungarian and Polish economies as a whole, but for a very tiny part of them. The relevant EC regulation declares that the projects funded 'must benefit the private sector in particular'. Furthermore, the regulation makes clear that the aim is for this aid to be made up largely of counterpart funds: in other words, to receive the aid, Poland and Hungary must switch parts of their own budgetary resources towards projects that back the private sector of their economies. Finally, while the plan envisages taking into account the preferences of the recipient countries, nevertheless, 'the Commission will take steps to identify areas where such aid can be most useful.' In other words, ultimate authority for the aid-allocation decisions will be kept in the hands of the EC and not the elected governments of Eastern Europe.

In the first weeks of 1990, the other countries of Eastern Europe put in applications for G24 aid under the Phare programme. But the Commission made clear on 1 February that such aid would not be forthcoming unless the countries concerned committed themselves to 'economic liberalization with a view to introducing market economies'.<sup>26</sup> After gaining what it considered to be adequate assurances

---

<sup>26</sup> Communication, Commission of the European Communities, 1 February 1990.

on this score, the Commission decided on 3 May to recommend that the Phare programme for Hungary and Poland be extended to cover Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Romania and Yugoslavia.<sup>7</sup> In short, this programme amounts to a direct intervention into the heated political debates within Eastern Europe over the scope and shape of privatization.

The projected new European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), suggested by the French government, backed by the EC's December summit, and finally given legal approval by its forty-one member states (including such paragons of liberal-democratic virtue as King Hassan's Morocco) in June of this year, has been a source of bitter disputes, especially between the USA and West European states. It is the first major multilateral institution within the international financial system in which the USA does not exercise a controlling vote: in so far as the twelve EC members act together, they can dictate the Bank's policy. But the fundamentals of that policy are not in dispute. The original document laid before the EC's December summit makes clear that one of its central objectives is to 'assist moves to market-oriented economies and structural adjustments' in Eastern Europe. This privatizing mission has now been set in concrete in the EBRD's legal constitution: at least 60 per cent of the funds disbursed under the Bank's aegis must be directly devoted to private-sector development; while the remaining funds, devoted to public-sector infrastructure projects, must be geared towards indirect assistance for the private sector.

### The New Planning

The entire framework of Western policies and institutions for the privatization drive in Eastern Europe is designed to result in the shortest possible transition to capitalism in these states. When that transition has taken place, and is judged secure in political as well as social and economic terms, these states will certainly be fully integrated into the institutions of the world economy. But two additional points about this process are worth stressing. First, the entire operation depends upon Eastern Europe remaining politically fragmented into separate states, each with its own bilateral relation with the West's institutions. Only in this way can the latter fine-tune their combinations of sanctions, controls and inducements to respond to the domestic social and political tensions and pressures in each individual state. And secondly, the key decisions on which projects to approve and which to reject remains firmly in the hands of the Western institutions. In other words, the planning of the process whereby each of these states will be integrated into the global and regional division of labour will largely be determined outside the borders of the states concerned. To take a simple example, one of the most vital sectors for most of these states is agriculture. The really big decisions about the future of this sector are

---

<sup>7</sup> At the EC Foreign Ministers' meeting on 18 June, Commissioner Frans Andriessen won majority support for a recommendation to the Group of 24 that Romania should be excluded from G24 aid because of the character of its government (*The Financial Times*, 19 June 1990).

not taken in the market but by public bodies. And the fate of the sector in Eastern Europe will very largely be decided by such bodies as the EC and the EBRD. Exactly the same pattern will be repeated in most of the other key branches of these economies, given that institutions like the EBRD conceive their function as being to plan the shape of the private sector in the East. Planning is not, therefore, finished as far as Eastern Europe is concerned. The really big strategic issues will still be decided by planning, but in new decision centres located in the West.

The European Council meeting of EC heads of government, held on 8–9 December 1989, asked the Commission to work out the terms for future Association Agreements between the EC and the various individual East European states. They felt such agreements would help to 'promote political stability' in Eastern Europe. It has been stressed that Association status is not a prelude to the states of Central and Eastern Europe becoming members of the so-called 'European Community'. Indeed, it is presented as an alternative, for in the words of one EC Commissioner, these states are too backward to become members of 'Europe' in the foreseeable future. Association status should allow freer trade with the EC, but the terms of association remain to be spelt out. What we do know is that the granting of this status is by no means automatic; there are strings attached: the EC 'will expect decisive steps to have been taken towards systems based on... economic liberties.' While the G24 aid will be available for countries committing themselves to capitalism, Association status will 'relate to performance as well as commitments'.<sup>25</sup>

### The Political Impact of the New Diplomacy

The effects of the diplomatic effort I have described here are already deep within the new political systems of the East European states. In every case where the West's policy objectives have been carried some way into domestic life, enormous strains have started to govern the internal politics of the state concerned. Leaving aside Yugoslavia, where the IMF drive is literally fragmenting the state, we might briefly examine these effects to date.

The Polish case is a sombre warning of what may be in store in the rest of the region. The Balcerowicz Plan, named after the deputy prime minister in the Mazowiecki government but fathered by the IMF, has cut living standards by some 40 per cent so far this year—an austerity drive of unparalleled scope in postwar international history. Increasingly desperate pleas for the removal of Western financial pressure have been ignored. The new government's political authority has been immensely strong but is being undermined by the week, since the policy it is implementing strikes at the heart of its legitimacy—its claim to embody the tradition of the Polish working-class movement, Solidarity. Tensions within the political elite have now burst

---

<sup>25</sup> Quotations are from 'Europe Information' produced by the Commission, 1 February 1990.

forth in a bitter struggle between Walesa and the government and parliamentary leaderships of Mazowiecki, Geremek and Michnik. The real content of this open war within Solidarity is revealed by the strikes that erupted on the railways and in the Gdansk Shipyard in May: the workers feel utterly betrayed by the policy of what they took to be their own government, and Walesa is giving voice to this despair. There is a very real prospect of the breakdown of the new liberal-democratic order itself in Poland, if the only political movement with popular roots is torn apart.

In Hungary, the newly victorious Democratic Forum has been plunged into a crisis deriving from the West's backing for the Free Democrats, the one political group in Hungary unequivocally in favour of a wrenching, Thatcherite turn towards capitalism. The Democratic Forum contains not the slightest hint of leftism, yet it is not trusted in the West to carry through the kind of harsh austerity and restructuring programme thought necessary. The Free Democrats' poor election result brought a swift Western response in the form of a move against the victorious party: financial institutions immediately withdrew funds and financial backing from the Hungarian economy. Democratic Forum leader Antall's initial attempt to denounce these moves and appeal to the West soon gave way to offering the Free Democrats a coalition government and the presidency of the country. These moves have in turn produced a deep split within the Democratic Forum.

In Romania and Bulgaria, there has been no overthrow of the Communist Parties; and a prime Western—or at least American—objective in both countries has evidently been to achieve just that through the spring elections. But the West's resources of financial and economic diplomacy have been weaker in these two countries: Romania does not have significant debts, while in March the Bulgarian government took the step—unique in the region—of obtaining a moratorium on its repayments of principal on its very large debt. Direct political intervention was therefore used to back the opposition parties in both states, with demonstrative American funding and guidance being proffered to the Romanian Liberals and the Bulgarian coalition of opposition groups. The hope seems to have been to apply Chancellor Kohl's tactics for the GDR elections, of in effect telling the voters to back the parties with access to Western funds: the Bulgarian opposition leader bluntly declared that he had been told by British Foreign Secretary Hurd that the Communist Party would not get a penny from the West if it won the elections. Whitehall's denial was unconvincing. Yet this failed to achieve success: the National Salvation Front overwhelmingly triumphed in Romania, and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the reformed Communist Party) won an overall majority in Bulgaria. The personnel ruling these political groups are, in effect, the old Communist Party establishments with new leaders and policies. The West has not felt able to challenge the validity of the election results themselves, but in Romania there are strong indications of an attempt to destabilize and split the National Salvation Front, targeting President Iliescu: the EC's swift decision to cancel its aid package to Romania following the June clashes in Bucharest is evidence of this.

Only in Czechoslovakia does there seem to be some consonance between Western diplomacy and democratic will, both favouring the Civic Forum. But even here the West's policy is generating tensions. Civic Forum's election manifesto is a very different document from the Thatcherite policies of Hungary's Free Democrats;<sup>19</sup> and therefore, as in the Polish case, the impact of Western diplomacy will strike within the dominant political group. At the same time, Western financial leverage is far weaker in the credit-strong Czechoslovak case, and the Communist Party's showing as the second strongest electoral force stands as a warning not to launch the country down Poland's helter-skelter. Yet the divisions within Civic Forum over the best response to the West's pressure for a drastic, painful social transformation are already out in the open and are likely to sharpen and deepen as the months go by.<sup>20</sup>

### An East European Third Way?

The evident enthusiasm of Western policy makers for capitalism is, of course, only to be expected. Indeed it is widely shared by the various new political leaders in Eastern Europe, including, it should be said, many leaders of the erstwhile Communist Parties. But the unbending, coercive, diplomatic drive for 'shock therapy' was not at all what the current leaders of the new regimes could have expected or wished for. The cumulative effect of Western policy is not only to encourage progress towards capitalism, but also to favour one capitalist model over another, namely the *laissez faire*, monetarist model. Thus during the Communist period the prevailing regimes furnished generous subsidies to the arts, higher education and the media, the better to control them. Even in crisis-ridden Poland, six regional opera companies flourished during the 1980s. Democratization could permit theatre groups, music circles, cultural magazines, publishing houses, newspapers, film studios, research centres and the like to contribute to the rebirth of a vital and pluralistic civil society. But it is already clear that this will not happen if all public subsidies are withdrawn and cultural institutions privatized. It is a remarkable fact that Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell are now extending their media empires to Eastern Europe—in Maxwell's case despite his notorious role of toady to the previous rulers. The financial pressures applied by Western institutions are helping to foster the climate in which all public subsidies must be ended and industries found suitable for privatization, including, among the latter, what were previously thought of as cultural resources.

The notion of a more-or-less homogeneous civil society throwing off the oppressor state and making a technical-economic switch to 'free markets' backed by a largely united democratic popular will, has

<sup>19</sup> Civic Forum's 10 April election manifesto calls for various forms of ownership: municipal, communal, cooperative, as well as joint-stock and private companies. It stresses the need for a strong domestic base as a counterweight to foreign capital; for a 'thoughtful social policy'; and for strong trade unions to soften the impact of marketization.

<sup>20</sup> President Havel attempted, after the elections, to remove Finance Minister Klaus by appointing him head of the National Bank. But Klaus felt strong enough to insist on retaining his ministerial post.

proved naive. A strong, authoritarian state is being fashioned to force through the transition to capitalism. The fact that the new regimes, though strongly backed in the main by the intelligentsia in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, lack the buttressing of entrenched, already existing capitalist institutions and social processes, means that the backbone must be supplied from external diplomatic sources.

Indeed Western specialists do not doubt the continuing strength of collectivist institutions and values in Eastern Europe. The state farms and cooperatives of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria remain both productive and popular. Workers throughout the region are resorting to trade-union action to defend their jobs or to demand a stake in the enterprises for which they work: new and old unions vie with one another to attract this new worker militancy. There are many aspects of welfare and social provision which enjoy widespread support. While the former ruling parties languish in various degrees of discredit, they have not been eliminated save in Poland—the country where the former rulers themselves pioneered the turn to capitalism.

There is no technical obstacle to a successful pursuit of market socialism in these societies, provided they are able to operate as normal states integrated into the institutions and division of labour of the world capitalist economy. The failure of attempts at market reform in Kadar's Hungary and in Jaruzelski's Poland were failures of weak and compromised regimes, devoid of genuine socialist credentials and commitment. But what if market socialism were adopted by a strong, authoritative government in, say, Czechoslovakia today?

A coupling of pluralist democracy, public ownership and social citizenship in the post-Communist states of Eastern Europe is not an acceptable option for Western policy makers. And they know very well that the current support for capitalism in Eastern Europe is superficial in the basic sense that it is no more than a policy *idea*, backed by a professional middle class whose aspirations were frustrated in the world of Brezhnevism; it is not the support of actually existing capitalists, of people with a real stake in the circuits of capital. There is thus the risk that if the edifice of controls and exclusions from the world economy is dismantled today and the drive for capitalism in these states fails tomorrow, market socialism of some sort will be the end result of the process, while Western economic diplomacy will have been disarmed.

Throughout this survey, I have treated Western diplomatic efforts as a united force. On the main issues discussed here, that unity has indeed been impressive. Particularly striking has been the acquiescence and collusion of the social democrats of Western Europe in the West's entire *drang nach Osten*. (By contrast, the wing of the American Democratic Party led by Senator Gephardt has been more critical.) Much of this drive has passed through a European Community in which the Left controls a majority within the European Parliament and in whose Commission the presiding genius is a French socialist. The Social Democrats, along with the Christian Democrats, have championed a social-market model of development, as opposed to the

Thatcherite market; yet they have not raised their voices against the demand that entry into the world economy be conditional upon sweeping privatizations. The failure of the Western social democrats to champion the cause of the East Europeans has been accompanied by a derisory showing for the democratic parties of Eastern Europe in the round of spring elections. In countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary these parties were indistinguishable from the Right programmatically while lacking all the virtues of the parties of the Right for implementing such programmes, above all the trust of Western capital. If the West's current diplomatic effort succeeds in Eastern Europe, there will be little chance of a strong social-democratic movement in that part of the continent: the political cleavage will far more likely pit against one another the parties of liberal capitalism and the authoritarian populist and nationalist movements.

But divisions have nevertheless surfaced in the West in recent months—difference of expediency, of state interest and of ruling ideology. The former surfaced in May when strikes broke out in Poland: the IMF made a tasteless attempt to disclaim responsibility for the entire package of Polish government measures, and voices were raised criticizing the folly of driving for capitalism at the price of sacrificing democracy and political stability in the region. The Christian Democrat/Socialist leaders in Western Europe are prone to pay lip-service to social-corporatist themes, while Bush and Thatcher stress the virtues of *laissez faire*. Such differences of emphasis reflect different state interests. The Italian and French governments, reeling from the historical consequences of German unification, have been unhappy with the continued pursuit of economic warfare against the USSR, wishing to maintain the integrity of the Soviet state and to ensure that it remains a strong player to act as a counterbalance to Germany in the new politics of Europe. The French government has also been far more ready to accept the newly elected governments of Romania and Bulgaria than have some other Western governments. The French government not only wants to bind Germany into the EC; it also wishes to be able to bring into play a stable Eastern Europe, including the USSR, in a future Europe so dominated by the strength of Germany. In this perspective, Mitterrand has envisaged NATO's survival as resting inside a new, strong pan-European security framework in which the East is included as a friend rather than enemy. At the same time, with unification assured, the Bonn government is now eager to gain Soviet acceptance of the new balance in Europe, and has dangled the prospect of credits before the Soviet government in an effort to achieve this.<sup>21</sup> For the USA (and Britain), on the other hand, NATO is the key instrument through which their political influence in Western Europe is secured. It is strengthened by the existence of a possible threat in the East, and weakened by a pan-European collective security community including the USSR. Therefore the collapse of the Gorbachev government and its replacement by a more anti-Western

<sup>21</sup> In June, Bonn granted the Soviet government a first \$1.7 billion loan, directly linked to Soviet acquiescence in aspects of reunification (*The Guardian*, 27 June). At the July G7 meeting in Houston, Bonn received the green light to extend a further \$15 billion of credits to Moscow, but implementation is to await the report of a team of Western financial experts on the progress of Soviet market reforms.



leadership would not be a disaster. Neither would a failure of the Two Plus Four talks, or the aborting of the projected CSCE conference; both these events would indeed strengthen the shaky case for maintaining NATO. These overarching political interests incline the American government (and Thatcher) towards a tough stand against any concessions to the USSR until a government emerges there unequivocally committed to capitalist restoration. And, a fortiori, that policy would apply to Romania and Bulgaria as well as to the rest of Eastern Europe. Neither Bush nor Thatcher can afford to be seen as responsible for Gorbachev's downfall, but neither are they willing to extend substantial economic concessions to Moscow.

### The Myth of the Depoliticized World Market

Whatever the outcome of these disputes, the politics of the new Eastern Europe cannot be adequately understood through the concepts of conventional liberal thought—the latter's categorical severance of economics from politics, its image of the world economy as a naturalized market, its restriction of the notion of political power in international affairs to the application of military force and juridical authority, and its consequently formal-legal conception of sovereignty and self-determination. Treating internal and external politics as largely autonomous spheres does not allow us to capture the real dynamics of change in Eastern Europe today. The starting point for a realistic grasp of this process must involve an appreciation of the central political role of the Western states in the internal affairs of the East European states. That role is made possible by the West's coercive power of exclusion from a world economy managed by political institutions in the hands of the leading capitalist states. It is further strengthened by the West's maintenance of the instruments of economic warfare developed in the Cold War. In so far as the governments in the East respond adequately to Western objectives within their own societies, exclusions from the institutions of the world economy will be lifted, and the instruments of economic blockade will be put to one side, though not abolished, just as immediate debt repayment problems may be eased but overall debt obligations maintained.

Some commentators declare that the West is simply being realistic in seeking to establish a system that works—capitalism—rather than engaging in yet another utopian experiment—some 'third way'. And they characteristically add that the entire history of Communism proves the danger and folly of grandiose experiments in largescale social engineering, implying that the 'third way' involves just this. Yet ideas about a 'third way' involve precisely a stand against plunging Eastern Europe into the greatest vortex of social engineering seen in Europe since the end of the war. The 'third way' is quite simply a plea for starting from the *existing situation* in Eastern Europe today: democratic political systems, combined with an economy dominated by the public sector, but using the mechanisms both of market regulation and redistributive social policies.

Holistic schemes for social engineering can indeed work. Capitalism can most certainly be restored in Eastern Europe. But if such schemes

are forced through helter-skelter, without background experience, without cautious trial and error over alternative means, and imposed coercively from the top, they may generate explosive social tensions with the likelihood of authoritarian political consequences. This is indeed precisely the dynamic of the doctrinaire experiment launched by the IMF in Poland at the start of the year. The one organization with political authority, the grouping of erstwhile advisers to Walesa under the name of Solidarity, is now being torn apart by these social tensions, while authoritarian populist currents hostile to both liberalism and democracy are gaining strength, not least among social groups who most fervently supported Solidarity in the early 1980s.<sup>22</sup>

On a more general level, this survey has implied a fundamental problem already familiar to those concerned with North-South relations: by what right do a handful of capitalist states assert their political power over the world economy? It is in this field of what conventional liberal thought presents as a depoliticized world market, that the West's decisive political power lies, largely hidden, today. Military strength is, if understood politically, merely an ancillary buttress to this power over world economics: it steps in to preserve this system of domination, and has a defensive or regulatory quality. Only a new cosmopolitanism, a new globalization of categories like self-determination and popular sovereignty, and the reconstruction of our ways of thinking about the relationships between economic and political institutions, will enable us to grasp the practical meaning for people of what is happening in Eastern Europe today. It will bring into focus these seemingly peripheral and technical multilateral organizations that work in the shadows between the borders of national political systems so brilliantly lit up by the media.

---

<sup>22</sup> See Edward Mortimer, 'Where Are You Marshall and Monet?', *The Financial Times*, 10 July 1990, for an account of the strains that are being imposed on Poland's nascent democracy by Western policy.

# POSTMODERNISM AND SOCIETY

Communications and Culture General Editors  
Rosalind Brunt, Simon Frith, Stuart Hall and  
Angela McRobbie

Edited by Roy Boyne, Lecturer in Applied  
Social Science, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
Polytechnic and Ali Rattansi, Lecturer in  
Sociology, Open University

Neither a manifesto nor a one-sided  
critique, this new book introduces a  
number of original essays exploring  
various aspects of that contemporary  
cultural explosion phenomenon  
named postmodernism. These essays  
are prefaced by an introductory essay  
which sets out the major lines of a  
debate which is about nothing less  
than the current shape and future  
prospects of our society.

► **POSTMODERNISM AND SOCIETY** will be published by Macmillan  
Education in August and will be available from all good bookshops

In case of difficulty, for inspection copies or details of related titles  
return this form to:

Amenda Cullen, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 2XS  
OR TELEPHONE 0256 29242 EXTENSION 3277

► I am interested in **POSTMODERNISM AND SOCIETY**

Please send me

☐ hardback copy/copies 0 333 47510 0

☐ paperback copy/copies 0 333 47510 0

(Cheques should be made payable to Macmillan  
Education, adding 10% for postage and packing)

☐ an inspection copy 0 333 47510 0

☐ details of related titles

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

**M**  
MACMILLAN

# INTERNATIONAL

## FAREWELL PERESTROIKA

### A Soviet Chronicle

Boris Kagarlitsky

From the striking coalminers of Siberia, the human chain protests of the Baltic republics and the burgeoning of a Soviet environmental movement, to the rallies of the fascist *Parryat* and the debates inside the People's Congress, Kagarlitsky's book records and analyses a nation and a system in turmoil.

£8 95/US\$16 95 paper 0 86091 508 5  
£24 95/US\$45 00 hardback 0 86091 252 2

## RED BROTHERHOOD AT WAR

### Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos since 1975

Grant Evans & Kelvin Rowley

This rigorously revised edition provides a timely account of the complex relations within contemporary Indochina, and debunks the Cold War imagery of an inscrutable bloc. In order to explain how communist victory has led to fraternal war rather than peaceful internationalism.

£11 95/US\$18 95 paper 0 86091 501 8  
£34 95/US\$60 00 hardback 0 86091 286 X

## US HEGEMONY UNDER SIEGE

### Class, Politics and Development in Latin America

James Petras & Morris Morley

This expansive study sets up a critical context for Menem's Thatcherite experiment in Argentina, Fujimori's victory in Peru and Collor's near-defeat at the hands of Brazil's Workers' Party, in a sub-continent squeezed between remorseless US foreign policy, and the equally irresistible force of local capital.

£9 95/US\$16 95 paper 0 86091 988 2  
£27 95/US\$45 00 hardback 0 86091 280 9

## STATES OF EMERGENCY

### Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978

Robert Lumley

Ranging from the students of 1968 to the Autonomists of 1977, and drawing on the work of such theorists as Eco, Melucci, Bobbio and Negri, Lumley's faithful balance of social and cultural analysis makes a vital contribution to both Italian social history and current political discussion.

£12 95/US\$18 95 paper 0 86091 989 2  
£39 95/US\$60 00 hardback 0 86091 284 X

INTELLIGENT DISCERNING  
RADICAL INTERNATIONAL  
OPEN-MINDED INDEPENDENT



VERS O

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR.  
USA: 29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001-2291

## *A Culture in Contraflow—II*

### 4. Aesthetics

A movement from modes of production to those of communication, which marks the historical anthropology of Jack Goody was, of course, also one of the central themes of the work of Raymond Williams. The parallels in the development of an original cultural materialism in the two bodies of writing are not a mere coincidence. For both thinkers started out under the joint influence of Leavis and the Marxism of the anti-fascist moment. Politically, it was perhaps the tension of this background which kept them from rejoining the ranks of British Communism after the war. Intellectually, it seems likely that it provided much of the impulse behind the eventual syntheses at which each arrived—whose affinities can be seen in their collaboration in a collective project on human communication.<sup>28</sup> Logically enough, literary criticism had been the other refuge of the idea of a social totality within English culture, at a time when it was virtually everywhere else repressed. By 1968 it was already clear that this was the area from which had emerged—with *The Long Revolution*—a socialist theory able to measure itself against the

overall forms of life in capitalist Britain. The next twenty years saw Raymond Williams become not only the most distinctive political thinker of the British Left, but the central figure in literary studies in the country at large. There is a paradox in any such description, because the whole force of Williams's work in this period was eventually to undo the very notion of 'literature' as a separate kind of writing. Literary criticism itself, in the traditional sense, formed in many ways the smallest part of his output: of his books after *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1968), only *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970) really fits the term, though particular essays approximate it.

### The Shift to Cultural Studies

The work of the 'break', with all current critical forms, was *The Country and the City* (1973), which remains Williams's masterpiece: a study of the changing representations of rural and urban life in English writing since the Jacobean period—and of the social transformations they refracted or hid—which is also an unforgettable critique of agrarian nostalgia and industrial hubris alike. There followed a pioneering study of the interplay between technology and cultural form in television, drawn in good part from American experience, and the first critical exercise of historical semantics in English, a field largely unexplored outside Germany.<sup>59</sup> *Marxism and Literature* (1977), in more ways than one marking a significant radicalization, sketched out a systematic theoretical agenda for future work intended to subvert the orthodoxies of both the traditions from which Williams had begun. Rejecting the distinction between base and superstructure—not on the usual grounds that the ideal sphere of the latter was indefensibly reduced to its material supports, but rather because if anything the former was wrongly narrowed and abstracted by the exclusion from it of the forces of cultural production—Williams taxed Marxism with too little, rather than too much, materialism. But in the same movement he also repudiated the distinction between a separate category of literary texts and other practices of writing—the very notion of a canon, central to Leavisite criticism—for captious selection and unselfconscious elitism. In its stead he argued for a democracy of signifying practices, each calling for its own appropriate responses, in a process dissolving aesthetic judgements into a tracing out of the conditions of production of any given piece of writing, and then of its reception by the current reader. Such deliberate, unfussed historical levelling recalls Gramsci, and it is perhaps no accident that Williams should here have taken over his notion of hegemony. But he gave it a characteristic twist, by emphasizing the continual processes of adjustment needed to secure any political or cultural hegemony above, and its perpetual failure—as an inherently selective definition of reality—to exhaust the meanings of popular experience below. These themes, providing the programme of such later collections as *Writing in Society* (1984), and finding fresh development in *Culture* (1985), effectively set many of the terms of the

<sup>58</sup> Raymond Williams, ed., *Contact: Human Communication and Its History*, London 1981, pp. 7–20, 105–26.

<sup>59</sup> *Television—Technology and Cultural Form*, London 1974; *Keywords*, London 1976.

cross-disciplinary growth of 'cultural studies'—abjuring 'literary criticism'—in these years, of which the work of the Birmingham Centre became the most influential example. Although Williams was not the only source of this shift, he was the outstanding individual one, the extent of his impact being visible in the general direction of the change. For the rest, the magnitude of his legacy—from the fictional to the political—exceeds the bounds of any sectoral survey such as this.

In a clear if complicated sense, Terry Eagleton has been the principal successor in the professional field they both occupied. From Williams's 'Second Generation', his intellectual background was very different: left Catholic and existentialist at the outset, the student upheavals of the sixties brought him to Marxism, and a strong appropriation of Louis Althusser. After sharp studies of Waugh and Green in *Exiles and Emigrés* (1970), he published a vigorous attack on every prevailing form of liberal humanism in English literary studies in *Criticism and Ideology* (1976). Inspired by the structuralist ferment within the French Marxism of the time, this polemic took among its prime targets *Scrutiny* and the work of Williams himself, treated as recalcitrantly petty-bourgeois and attractively socialist variants of the pursuit of humane literary values—where what was really needed was scientific investigation of the several ideologies at work in any given text. This swashbuckling objectivism dissolved through the encounter with Walter Benjamin which was the occasion of Eagleton's next work. An effervescent cocktail of different forms, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (1981) offered a set of variations on its subject's philosophy of history, theory of baroque drama, ideas of artistic aura and reproduction, and last but not least, revolutionary politics, in which a distinctive strain of *plumpey Deuben* was crossed with the first signs of post-structuralism.

### Eagleton's Literary Theory

In the previous ten years, the once sheltered world of English literary criticism had been lapped by successive waves of theory from Russia, Bohemia, Germany, France, the United States. The result was considerable disorientation among new entrants to the discipline. With *Literary Theory* (1983), Eagleton took the opportunity to chart this unfamiliar scene. Beginning with the heritage of Arnold, Eliot and Leavis, it looked pithily and entertainingly at the New Criticism and Northrop Frye, Husserl and Heidegger, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, Bakhtin and Derrida, Bloom and Kristeva, among others. Calculated to dispel any neophyte dizziness amidst this carousel of schools, by plain-spoken exposition, Eagleton's survey also had decided messages of its own. With small time for the nostalgias of New Criticism, the essentialism of phenomenology, or the technocracy of Frye, it struck a more lenient note with Prague structuralism, and a noticeably warmer one—with due qualifications—about post-structuralist and psychoanalytic trends, at any rate as exhibited by Derrida and Kristeva, viewed as welcome relays to feminist concerns. The overall argument of the book, however, converged with that of Williams. Literature as such was an illusion: it was that segment of writing

socially valued at any given time—such valuations being always imbued with the dominant relations of ideology and power. Literary criticism, or theory, was therefore no more than a branch of such ideologies, without unity or identity, to be buried unceremoniously.<sup>60</sup> What was required instead was a cultural theory equivalent to the older science of rhetoric—that is, a typology of the different forms and functions of signifying practices at large. Liberated from any canonical incubus, such a rhetoric could then freely mine every available methodological resource for particular ends, in the general service of a socialism giving substance to the liberal ideals of human betterment.

This obsequy for literary criticism left one ambiguity unresolved. Was it just literature that had been laid to rest, or the critical attitude as well? Williams had repudiated the very term criticism, as too contaminated by invidious judgement. But the strict logic of this position undermines the very politics it is designed to advance: for if texts are not to be criticized, on what grounds can societies? Eagleton's solution was to retain the term, but reposition it—shifting it from the terrain of the aesthetic to the experiential and symbolic. *The Function of Criticism* (1984) pursued this strategy by reconstructing the actual history of the idea and the practice of criticism, from the Enlightenment onwards. Born in Europe of the struggle against Absolutism, criticism flowered in England after the battle was won, as a meliorating consolidation of the class compromise achieved at the Glorious Revolution. Addison and Steele wrote as counsellors to a polite public in matters not just of books or plays, but manners and morals, as critics of everyday life as much as of the higher arts. That capacious, unforced sense of the continuity of social living, together with the ambition to educate and improve it, rested on the unity of what Habermas classically depicted as the new bourgeois world of the time—the eighteenth-century public sphere of newspapers and coffee houses, clubs and circulating libraries. By the early nineteenth century, this consensus had broken down, under the opposite pressures of commercial publishing and popular politics, producing a vehemently factional journal culture on the one hand, and the lonely voice of the romantic poet or moral sage on the other. The growth of a working-class readership saw a further disintegration of the public sphere into a received polarity between the educated elite and semi-literate mass. The meaning of criticism now became redefined. For Arnold it was the uplift of great works of literature alone that could redeem the lower orders. This conception of literary value passed down to Leavis, who attempted to reconcile Augustan and Romantic stances by emphasizing both the sociability of literature and the arduousness of understanding it—in opposition to either academic isolation, or amateur appreciation of its abiding tradition. In fact, *Scrutiny* merely became one more embattled minority. Its failure paved the way for ever more technical conceptions of criticism as a professional discipline without civilizing pretensions. Their sway was in due course overthrown by the vocally anti-objectivist 'literary theory' of the most recent period. Yet this too is only another avatar of the shrinking of

<sup>60</sup> *Literary Theory*, Oxford 1983, pp. 10–16, 201–204.



the critical project itself. Latter-day criticism, Eagleton concluded, serves no wider interest than itself. Williams's greatness was to escape its horizons, in a radical and unclassifiable oeuvre. But this work was in effect addressed to a counter-public that was missing—a politically organized, class readership, such as had once existed in Weimar Germany or Britain in the thirties. In the eighties, under the stifling weight of the mass media, feminism has come nearest to creating such an alternative public sphere. Although quite distinct in character from the rationalist school of the Enlightenment, it is this cultural space which points best to what ought to be the aim of contemporary criticism—to recover the original unity of its practice. Today, that means reconnecting the symbolic processes and shapings of subjectivity in social life to the unfinished political struggle for equality and emancipation.

### Aesthetic Value

Eagleton's re-functioning of criticism is thus very close to Williams's displacement of it. But it is not identical. There have been two directions from which literary value has come under pressure in the recent period: one a movement towards the social or the democracy of significations, the other a shift towards the metaphysical, or the instability of significations. These might be called the Low Road and the High Road to the dissolution of the aesthetic. Williams unambiguously took the first route. Eagleton's sorties, by contrast, have proceeded along both lines—combining demotic and deconstructionist motifs. There can be little doubt of the audience won for the case against literature made by these two foremost theorists of the Left in English studies. But such post-critical success has inevitably also had its pyrrhic side. For aesthetic value is not to be dispatched so easily—the wish to finish with it recalling Dobrolyubov, or Bazarov, more than Marx or Morris. Railing at canons is not the same as replacing them, which they have resisted. Evacuation of the terrain of literary evaluation in the traditional sense necessarily leaves its conventional practitioners in place. In England, this has meant the undiminished salience of such old-world figures as John Bayley, *don à tout faire*, Christopher Ricks or John Carey, professional *précieux* or stage-boor—if only because each represents an unignorable body of evaluation, treating of Hardy or Milton, Donne or Keats. In the wider world, the critics of the Yale School—De Man, Hartman, Bloom—exercise much greater influence than these local notables,<sup>61</sup> because they were able to combine substantial specific revaluations with more intoxicating philosophical ambitions: new visions of Rousseau, Wordsworth or Shelley alongside high doctrines of allegory, unreadability, gnosis. Eagleton, a skilful deflator of such reputations on either side of the Atlantic, has himself written well on Richardson and Shakespeare. But the centre of gravity of 'cultural theory' in Britain does not lie in this kind of work.

<sup>61</sup> The liveliest survey of the current theoretical scene, Imre Salusinszky's collection of interviews, *Criticism in Society*, London 1987, includes only one English critic, Frank Kermode.

That theory also has its own partiality. Although it formally aims to address all signifying practices and symbolic processes in a single egalitarian spirit, its bias is overwhelmingly verbal. Indeed, there is a sense in which this is a necessary condition of its plausibility. For writing is continuous with speaking as a generalized everyday practice in modern literate societies. There is no such ready prolongation from spontaneous *Lebenswelt* to skilled performance in the field of visual—let alone aural—signification. The arts of painting or music, as of course architecture, remain specialized and discontinuous from any common daily capacities. It is probably no accident that they are consistently neglected in this approach to culture. The visual deficit in traditional British education has been largely reproduced in the left insurgency against it. Film itself, like rock, has proved more assimilable to the radical paradigm here, as itself part-verbal in form. But it is striking that in the end the major attempts at a totalization of contemporary 'symbolic processes and forms of subjectivity' should have started out from architecture and painting, in the constructions of post-modernism by Fredric Jameson and his interlocutors (among them, in the event, Terry Eagleton).<sup>62</sup>

### The Visual Arts

Developments in the study of the visual arts provide an instructive comparison with these shifts in the literary field. Here there was little recent tradition of either wider intellectual ambitions, or significant radical influence, in the mainstream of the discipline. In the postwar period, art history in Britain came to be dominated for the most part by a rather narrow version of the Warburg tradition of high iconography—without any of the prodigious variety and invention of Panofsky—and the concern with formalized schemata of perception that was Gombrich's major extension beyond it. Attempts at more materialist enquiries never crossed a certain threshold of repute, whether from academic outsiders like Antal or Hauser or public sharpshooters like John Berger. From the early seventies onwards, however, the change was startling. Three contributions to this transformation stand out.

One way of describing the work of T.J. Clark would be to say that with it a modern Marxism became for the first time central to the discipline. But this would also be less than appropriate because of the suspicion each of these terms falls under—for different reasons—in the exceptional writing in question. Clark's first pair of books, *The Absolute Bourgeois* and *Image of the People* (1973), studies in French painting under the Second Republic, took their distance from Gombrich's legacy at the outset. A pictorial tradition, Clark pointed out, is always more than just a set of enabling visual schemes: it involves a repertoire of beliefs as well—a combination which normally renders invisible as much as it makes visible to the artist. To understand the foundations of the particular subject and style of a painter, it is necessary to look through the general constraints of the tradition to the specific situation and complex experience of the artist. Here,

<sup>62</sup> 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', in *Against the Grain*, London 1986, pp. 131–48.

however, the 'social history of art' as customarily practised (by Hauser and others) was the reverse of a guide: a positive obstacle, in its assumption that works of art passively 'reflect' classes or ideologies, which can then be taken as the relevant 'background' generating them. In reality artists actively 'convert' rather than express the social or aesthetic relations they encounter, into works that do not yield general 'analogies' between their forms and a wider history, but reveal variable detailed linkages.<sup>63</sup> A sense of detail was, of course, one of Aby Warburg's most famous directives. Clark owes his more to Walter Benjamin, whose writings on Baudelaire and Haussman lie behind his reconstructions of the upheaval of 1848 (including the part of the poet himself), and of the remodelling of Paris under the Second Empire. There is the same flair for the unexpected diagonal threads between the minutiae of trades, locales, persons, events, opinions, politics, within the tangled web of class: literary statistics brought into constellation with the canvasses themselves. The firmer organization of this Arcades-like mosaic, however, is in part due to themes derived from a quite different kind of Marxism—the theories of ideology (a topic in which Benjamin was not much interested) developed by Althusser and Macherey. Most important of all, in some ways, has been Clark's deployment of concepts that descend from the arsenal of Situationism, the most original of the iconoclasm of 1968. If there is any primary allegiance traceable in his writing, it would perhaps be to the ideas of Guy Debord on the spectacle.

The object of Clark's early work was the possibility of political art in the nineteenth century, taking the conjuncture of 1848–52 as a privileged moment for the exploration of what revolutionary painting or writing might have been. Unlike those of 1830, the barricades of 1848 produced no potent imagery. Of the artists who left indelible representations of the time, Millet helped to put down the June days, Daumier remained silent during the massacres, Delacroix denounced Republican government; only Baudelaire fought with the insurgents, from an outlook far from socialism if close to Blanqui. All these came at politics 'sideways', in responses that were private, quirky, even sullen—anything but the spirit of David half a century earlier. The one painter who wrested a truly public art—revolutionary in form and in matter—out of his private experiences was Courbet, inactive in Paris during 1848, but a great ironic pictorialist of rural class relations in his native Doubs, as the backwash of radical politics stirred the French countryside in 1849. Courbet's achievement was to appropriate the French traditions of high art to renew popular art, and project for a flickering moment its hegemony over the dominant culture. Everything in nineteenth-century painting—the easel tradition, the art market, the cult of the individual—weighed against such a political break, and it was soon stifled. After Courbet, there was no effective subversive art again till the epoch of Lissitzky and Tzara.

In his sequel, *The Painting of Modern Life*, Clark looks at what developed instead: the commercialization of leisure. Under the Second

<sup>63</sup> *Image of the People*, London 1973, pp 10–11.

Empire, Paris was brusquely remodelled by Haussman, creating new kinds of urban space and entertainment, while round it a belt of suburbia extended into the countryside, the setting for other forms of weekend recreation. It was just these scenes of the colonization of everyday life—no longer just of production, but now of distraction—by capital that formed the moral landscape of Impressionism. It was the expanding population of white-collar employees, the new petty bourgeoisie of shops and offices burgeoning in the big city, that especially lived them out. The apparent social indeterminacy of this stratum—its defiance of any rigid classification—provided an essential support to the mythology of modernity that came to define the self-conceptions of advanced art. For this ideology, which has persisted down to the present, the modern is the marginal, the mixed, the equivocal—that which eludes any order; and in this the *coaches nouvelles* were like a diffuse alter ego of the avant-garde, offering its natural avenue into contemporary life. What such tropes of modernism, in their emphasis on anomie rather than division, characteristically excluded from their line of sight was class. Here the alchemy of the spectacle was already at work, in those *café-concerts* where a petty-bourgeois audience patronized popular singers in sham-plebeian identification with those below, and would-be connoisseur aspiration to those above—attracting the complaisant brush of Degas or Toulouse. This—the very reverse of the hope nourished by Corbet—was, in effect, the founding moment of ‘popular culture’ in the sense we know it today: an unending expropriation of the imaginative forms of working-class experience, rendered into innocuous simulacra of themselves, for the reanimation of a middle-class sensorium. In this process the very notion of the ‘popular’ operates to suppress the ‘collective’, even if that substitution can never be absolutely secured, since the masters of the means of symbolic production ‘cannot control the detail of performance, and cannot afford to exorcise the ghost of totality once and for all from the popular machine.’<sup>64</sup> Impressionism generally affected a sardonic distance from the spectacular, but in truth such mildly playful superiority connived at it. Manet and Seurat were exceptions—their grandest compositions reticent in gaze, undecieved by the cult of the marginal, respectful of the unassuming dignity as well as comedy of leisure. The radical and democratic potential of depictions of modernity like these—on which Mallarmé even pinned political hopes—came to nothing, as dealing eventually made Impressionism a cynosure of high society. Such capture was inscribed in much of its conventionality from the start; but ‘subservience to the half-truths of the moment’, even ‘dogged servility’, were never, Clark notes, incompatible with artistic intensity; the value of paintings always lying primarily in their visual order rather than their ideological materials, for all the importance of the latter.<sup>65</sup>

### Reconstructing Art History

Interest in the tension between the two has by no means been confined to Clark. Indebted to him, but interweaving the pictorial and the

<sup>64</sup> *The Painting of Modern Life*, London 1983, p. 236.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

literary even more centrally, John Barrell's *Dark Side of the Landscape* (1980) looked at the ways in which rural poverty was figured in the English pastoral art of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, using the poetry of Gay, Crabbe, Goldsmith or Gray as a control for a series of sharp and unforeseen readings of the social conflicts beneath the surface of the paintings of Gainsborough, Morland and Constable—readings at variance with critics of the left (Berger, Williams) as much as the centre or right (Brookner, Vaizey). David Solkin's *Richard Wilson—the Landscape of Reaction* (1982) scrutinized in singularly unwavering mood the relations between the artist's commitment to classicism and his viewers and buyers among the conservative lesser gentry. But changes in art history have not lain simply in the growth of concern with the complex relationships between visual representations and social class. Another body of work of the greatest distinction has been materialist in a different kind of way: no less historical, but on the whole seeking 'lateral' connexions between painting or sculpture and other specific practices or institutions, rather than 'longitudinal' links through the social structure. Michael Baxandall first put his distinctive impress on the field with *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (1972). Quattrocento art was here studied through two prisms: the commercial conditions of a bespoke trade, in which painters worked to detailed contracts drawn up by their clients; and the period eye with which such Renaissance patrons viewed paintings, a 'cognitive style' derived from other kinds of germane experience that brought its own set of expectations to the interpretation of pictures. Emphasis on the importance of money in the history of art, familiar enough in itself, was here linked to a new enquiry into the visual skills of the customers who expended it, derived from such variegated activities as religious exercises, formulaic codifications of gesture, lay dancing, volumetric barrel-calculations, currency exchanges, which yielded specific pictorial values—a 'danced' kind of painting in Botticelli, 'gauged' in Piero, 'preached' in Fra Angelico. Such horizontal affinities reveal paintings as genuine social documents, Baxandall argued, but in a way that has little to do with crude illustrations of class.<sup>66</sup>

If class in Urbino or Florence received only a glance, it came into full focus in Augsburg or Ulm, when Baxandall came to his study of *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (1980). This great work enlarged his scope in a number of significant ways. The economic conditions and social hierarchies of South German towns in the half century before the Reformation were set out (at the head of the book) with meticulous care; but so too were the religious tensions on the eve of the upheaval which ultimately helped to bring this art to an end; the detailed mechanisms of the market for retables, amidst tenacious guild controls; and last but not least, the physical qualities of limewood itself, as a carving medium. These were then put into play with an unexpected array of practices that, Baxandall suggests, bore on the local cognitive style: among them chiromancy, calligraphy, and mastersong, which contributed to the forms of the Florid Style in German

<sup>66</sup> *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Oxford 1972, p. 132; understood here is a polemical reference to Antal's work on Florentine styles.

sculpture. All such collective circumstances, however, furnished only the gamut of possibilities available to the individual artists of the time; and it is with the carved images they chose to realize from them that the study concludes.

In his most recent work, *Patterns of Intention* (1985), Baxandall has moved to define—also extend—the principles of the kind of criticism he had been developing, in a quietly elegant theoretical programme for the history of art. Taking a case of engineering design, the construction of the Forth Bridge, as preliminary illustration, he argues that the right way to look at works of art is as solutions to problems in situations. The task of an 'inferential criticism' is to reconstruct the historical relationships between these three terms in a 'triangle of re-enactment', whose sides will be formed by: the charge and brief set the artist (problem); the cultural resources for tackling these (situation); the artist's own selection of options as they crystallize in the work itself (solution). Such a procedure puts active intentionality at the centre of its concerns: Baxandall polemicalizes—in terms very similar to Clark's attack on 'expression'—against the whole idea of 'influence', with its 'incongruous astral background', as a passive travesty of the actual response of one artist to another.<sup>67</sup> But it must proceed by inference in so far as the only final evidence of the artist's intention is the actual work itself. Baxandall then sets his programme to work with three pointedly disparate examples: Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler*, Chardin's *Lady Taking Tea*, and Piero's *Baptism*. In each a strikingly different cluster of resources is given salience, and a subtle quarrel made with customary interpretations. For Picasso, the importance of Apollinaire as avant-garde cryer for 'that wretched term Cubism'<sup>68</sup> is not set unduly high; but wider quasi-market relations of *trac*, in which a painter's output might be exchanged for historical reputation as much as for income or popularity, loom large. In the case of Chardin, on the other hand, Locke's philosophy of sensation, as mediated by French optical scientists, could inform his handling of perception (as Einstein's theory of relativity could not, *pace* Berger, inform Cubism). Piero would have been acutely aware of the mathematical problems of *commensurations*; there is no need (*pace*, say, Ginzburg) to alembicate a High Iconography to understand his *Baptism*, whose formal design was essentially controlled by the need to accommodate his monumental figure style to the unusual format of a large-scale vertical panel. The variability in the constituents of such criticism is a function of their relative yield in each case: political ideology or economic position would feature more prominently in other instances, although always needing—like other aspects of a painter's social being—to be treated with tact. For if the purpose of criticism is to sharpen our 'legitimate satisfactions' in works of art, its enquiries must be plausible and pertinent to that end—responsible to criteria of historical truth and aesthetic coherence. Baxandall, in words involuntarily echoing across a disciplinary divide, declares his preference for the pursuit of causal explanation rather than hermen-

<sup>67</sup> *Patterns of Intention—On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, London 1985, pp. 58–60.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52; for a—typically tacit—disavowal of Berger's account of Cubism, see p. 76.

eutic meaning, as the most rational and sociable service to a common visual experience: 'it is an important and attractive irony that here history should be more scientific, in a sense, the more it tends to criticism.'<sup>69</sup> There is a difficulty in this scheme of things. By effectively equating 'intention' with outcome, on the grounds that the mind of the artist is unknowable, Baxandall productively detours standard issues of signification. But the price is a terminological act of force that virtually endows the painting itself with purposive agency—an object more intent than the subject which intended it. The risk of such pragmatics is a—perhaps unobjectionable, or well-intentioned—fetishism. The title of *Patterns of Intention* is its least successful promise, amidst so many fulfilled. A final irony of this theory of the visual arts, instructive for current doctrines of literature, is that it should stress its commitment to a pictorial criticism as something, above all, 'conversable and democratic'.

### Art as Intersubjectivity

For all the force of the counter-examples represented in their different ways by Clark and Baxandall, no reconstruction of the field at large was likely to be able simply to bypass the intellectual hegemony of Gombrich, whose postwar position within it probably had no counterpart in any other English discipline. It fell to Norman Bryson, towards the end of this period, to develop the most effective critique of the perceptualism of *Art and Illusion*—the modelling of painting on isolate visual cognition, as filtered by an inherited scheme and corrected by an incremental brush. Against this whole conception, *Vision and Painting* stressed the nature of art as a set of intersubjective signs, anchored in specific social formations, whose analysis must always combine the resources of stylistics and iconology. Remarking on the lateness with which art history had encountered recent theoretical history, Bryson's work mobilizes post-structuralist along with structuralist motifs in its pursuit of the production of pictorial meaning. But it also seeks to capture the immanence of power within the image: the social inscription of painting. Here, however, an account that sets out to surpass the intuitions of Barthes or Bakhtin, held to be insufficiently radical, runs aground—in more senses than one, comes to rest—on those of Foucault. A brilliant meditation on the political limits of the hortatory image—*Marat*, *Guernica*—concludes by dismissing from art all idea of prescription as redundant to a practice that anyway always already juts into the social; and discounting all real capacity for disruption, as incompatible with the self-enforcing contract of signification itself. Since 'no one can depart from the consensual formations—the discourses—of the signifier without, at the level of information, risking a fade-out into non-intelligibility', censorship of the canvas is inherently unnecessary: 'painting and viewing are ultimately self-regulating activities, and do not require such anxious monitoring and exhortation: this is a *serene* system.'<sup>70</sup> A politics of the sign, once rendered all-pervasive, fatally veers towards a poetics of resignation. In this vision, only the labour

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>70</sup> *Vision and Painting*, London 1983, pp. 160–62.

of the painterly body, generating an imagery that characteristically excludes it, is left as illogical hope of subversion or intrusion.

In Bryson's sequel, *Tradition and Desire*, the intimations of value remain somatic, but now sublimated to a Lacanian register. In a series of virtuoso readings of David, Ingres and Delacroix, it is no longer the work of musculature but the dialectics of death and desire than escapes regulation, affording the chance for the oppressive weight of an all-too-cumulative pictorial tradition to be turned by the artist, in the act of innovation. The seductive ingenuity of many a local reflection here nevertheless issues into the same general paradox, resistance or revolt against tradition, proving in the end no more than inflections in the repertory of its self-sealing power.<sup>71</sup> In this Foucauldian trope, predictably, what Bryson once described as the 'hard logistics' of social demand or appropriation effectively disappear—the materialist instances of the enquiry dwindling to perfunctory background allusion in what comes near to a conventionally internalist study of the procession of the canon. Perhaps, among the new generation of art historians, Bryson could write the most penetrating critique of Gombrich because in the end he remains closest to him.

### Aesthetics and Ideology

Behind these displacements and transformations of two adjacent fields of criticism lay—perhaps increasingly uncontrollable—pressures concerned with the category of the aesthetic itself, at stake in all of them. Eagleton's recent magnum opus is a bid to master, or deflect, these. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* explores, criticizes, traverses a vast philosophical circuit, from the moment of Baumgarten to that of Baudrillard, in irregular orbit around the path of European reflections on art since the Enlightenment. The splendour of this enterprise comes not only from the wit of each particular portrait in Eagleton's gallery, but more generally from the amplification of vision that his distinctive attack on the topic brings. In effect, the aesthetic becomes preamble or password to the operations of the political, in the progress of bourgeois civilization from the dawn of the middle class to the noon of its post-modernity, where the sun now seems to many all but biblically to stand still. In this history, its appeal functions primarily as compensation or collusion. But its promise remains rooted in the corporeal realm of the senses that originally gave rise to the term—the body physical featuring as tacit valency against the body political. In between these two, Eagleton moves without constraint or intermission from the appetitive to the affective, from the imaginary to the mannerly, from the sentimental to the habitual, from the sensual to the spiritual, as so many variously pertinent registers of the aesthetic, in different times or thinkers. The largeness and ease of this traffic is one of the pleasures of this book. But it has its cost, lodged in the *parti pris* of the title. Is the aesthetic—only—ideology? What the expansion of the category effects is, of course, the effacement of art within it. Animating it is a profound protest, drawn from the whole Marxist tradition, against the lures of any rarefaction

---

<sup>71</sup> *Tradition and Desire*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 212–14.



of beauty. But that tradition has also often been characterized by a confusion between the technical specialization and the social separation of art. The former, a historically irreversible moment of the division of labour, would outlive any passing away of capital itself. One might say that while a rhetoric of the body, as undifferentiated site of experience, does generate an ideology of the aesthetic, it is the discrimination of skills that founds its reality. In the great roll call of German names that peoples Eagleton's account, the sobering voice of Max Weber is missing.

## 5. Philosophy

Sociology, which gained a reputation for radicalism in the late sixties, was predictably a target of official dislike by the early eighties: an aversion given literal-minded expression by ministerial insistence that the Social Science Research Council must change its name if it was to continue to receive (reduced) public funds. But it was actually philosophy which, more surprisingly, provoked perhaps the baldest confrontation between the Thatcher regime and the world of higher learning—when, towards the end of the decade, the editor of *Mind* mounted such a withering attack on government treatment of the discipline as to sting the Minister for Higher Education into a furious reply, followed by a virulent further outburst over the coffin of England's most famous postwar philosopher.<sup>78</sup> Little of this could have been expected from the starting points of the mid sixties. English philosophy had then been the most uncontentious of disciplines, as the doctrines of the later Wittgenstein had settled down into the routines of ordinary-language analysis propagated from Oxford: proudly formalist, provincial and ahistorical, with little or no connexion to surrounding branches of thought.

Twenty years later, little was left of this. Substantive enquiries had multiplied; international influences become general; intellectual memory more widespread; inter-disciplinary linkages fairly numerous. British philosophy remained analytical, and its commonest concerns continued to lie within what was once the traditional ambit of epistemology. But this itself underwent major changes. After the passing of Austin and Ryle, the Oxford cult of ordinary language faded. With the gradual widening of parochial horizons, the authority of Wittgenstein became relativized: Carnap was rediscovered, Quine more seriously assimilated, and—in particular—Frege acquired new centrality. In these conditions, the balance of influence within the field shifted across the Atlantic. The leading edge of an English-speaking analytic philosophy, now more unified than ever before, became predominantly American, in the writing of Davidson, Sellars, Kripke, Nagel, Putnam, Dennett, Searle and others. In England, the outstanding figure has been Michael Dummett. It is essentially his

---

<sup>78</sup> See the exchange between Simon Blackburn, editor of *Mind*, and Robert Jackson, Minister for Higher Education, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 December 1988–5 January 1990—addresses originally entitled 'Philosophy and British Universities', and 'Philosophy and Higher Education'; and Jackson's letter to *The Independent* on the death of A.J. Ayer, of 30 June 1990.

reception of Frege that has distinguished local discussion. Dummett's best-known thesis is that Frege revolutionized philosophy by overthrowing the long Cartesian tradition that accorded priority to the theory of knowledge, in favour of a theory of meaning: thereafter, definitively, semantics rather than epistemology would become its foundational pursuit. 'Only with Frege was the proper object of philosophy established.'<sup>73</sup> But the force of Dummett's account of Frege rests less on this claim, which he readily admits might be thought overpitched, than on its argument for the superiority of Frege's outlook over that of Wittgenstein, in two central respects. Whereas Wittgenstein had imagined an indefinite multiplicity of language-games, incommensurable with each other, so paving the way for the particularist doctrine that the signification of sentences could only lie in their heterogeneous usages, Frege understood that language is by its nature a *system*, competence in which presupposes a tacit grasp of certain general principles that are never reducible to a mere tally of local utterances. At the same time, Frege's philosophy, for all its emphasis on meaning, was not only systematic, but critical. For it retained a stringent concern with truth, where the laxity of Wittgenstein's eventual pragmatics—his notion that all language-games can find their warrant in culturally variable 'forms of life', as apprehended by Spengler<sup>74</sup>—was inevitably to afford a franchise for intellectual relativism. Initially close to Wittgenstein's legacy, Dummett came through his prolonged work on Frege to a reaffirmation of the central importance of the assertoric dimension of language—the specificity and necessity of its claims to accurate report of the world—as against the performative functions so favoured by Austin, for whom there could be no critique of current usages. Wittgenstein's basic programme thus had to be rejected: 'philosophy cannot be content to leave everything as it is,' for 'linguistic practice is not immune to, and may well stand in need of, revision.'<sup>75</sup> Upholding by contrast the traditional conception of philosophy as a 'sector in the quest for truth',<sup>76</sup> Dummett in effect reinstates epistemology within the framework of semantics.

Dummett's technical work in the philosophy of meaning has been

<sup>73</sup> *Truth and Other Enigmas*, London 1978, p. 458.

<sup>74</sup> For Wittgenstein's debt to the author of *The Decline of the West*, the best commentary is Stephen Hulmy, *The Later Wittgenstein*, Oxford 1987, pp. 83–86, 260–63. The collection of texts in *Culture and Value*, Oxford 1980, contains many insights into Wittgenstein's general outlook on the world. See, for example, his welcome for the atomic bomb, or his eminently contemporary reflection: 'I believe that bad housekeeping in the state fosters bad housekeeping in families. A workman who is constantly ready to go on strike will not bring up his children to respect order either.' pp. 49c, 63c

<sup>75</sup> 'Reply to Crispin Wright', in Barry Taylor, ed., *Michael Dummett's Contributions to Philosophy*, Dordrecht 1987, p. 234. Dummett's view of Wittgenstein continues to bear traces of his earlier loyalty, as can be seen from the somewhat tortured later explanations of his attack on Gellner, and the pardonably desperate claim that it is best 'to approach Wittgenstein's later work bearing in mind different possible interpretations, without always trying to decide which is the intended one; frequently, his ideas will be found fruitful and stimulating under all possible interpretations of them [sic].' *Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. xi–xiv, 451.

<sup>76</sup> *Truth and Other Enigmas*, p. 456.

combined with a *tour de force* in the history of cards, and a critical theory of votes: cultural and institutional interests not entirely unconnected with certain of his professional themes.<sup>77</sup> It has also been accompanied—in his own account, dogged—by political concerns of an intensity that sets his writing apart, even more than his commitment to system, from the school that preceded him. A Catholic of strong moral conviction, he threw himself into work against the growth of racism in the late sixties, regarding it as the most important and disastrous development in Britain since the war. For 'racism is quite exceptional among social evils in requiring no calculation whatever of cause and effect to see what its elimination involves. Of almost any other injustice, it is possible to put up some argument that it must be tolerated because, if we try to remove it, worse will befall; but racism has no compensating advantages, but merely allows the exploitation of one group by another.'<sup>78</sup> It was not until the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill passed by the Wilson government in 1968 had brought a 'tragic termination' to initial attempts to stop the development of the UK into a racist society, with all its consequences for future suffering, that Dummett—registering a 'decisive defeat'—reverted to his work on Frege.<sup>79</sup> A decade later, he was still outspokenly attacking Christian glosses on the new Conservatism that covered over not only the evils of institutionalized racism, but also the indignities of industrial drudgery and the enormities of nuclear deterrence. The sense of Dummett's public interventions over these years is contained in a characteristic confession: 'I expect there are many people who long, as I do, for a political programme of a radically new kind, not just an uneasy compromise between capitalism and socialism, but one that would sweep away the injustices and inhumanities of capitalism as effectively as would socialism, but would provide a rather more effective safeguard against State tyranny than does existing parliamentary democracy.'<sup>80</sup>

## Reasons and Persons

The substantive turn, evident within epistemology, has been even more marked in what once would have fallen into the domain of ontology. The change here could be described as that from the moment of Strawson to that of Parfit—from the studiously 'descrip-

---

<sup>77</sup> *The Game of Tarot* (with the assistance of Sylvia Mann), London 1980, an august celebration of the intricacy and diversity of the game as it spread across Europe from its origins in *trascanto* Italy, could be read as a kind of homage to Wittgenstein's favourite metaphor; but Dummett parts company with him on just the epistemic point that Wittgenstein would have 'excessively purged'—for as he notes, received occult interpretations of Tarot are not seamless parts of playing the game, as a form of life, but parasitic errors about it, harmful to those who believe in them. *Voting Procedures*, Oxford 1984, brings systematic mathematical theory sharply to bear on electoral arrangements, as a condition of arriving at the truth about them, finding those in England scandalous in their lack of protection for minorities, and proposing a simpler and more equitable alternative to the single transferable vote—the quota preference score.

<sup>78</sup> *Catholicism and the World Order*, London 1979, pp. 27–28.

<sup>79</sup> Frege, *Philosophy of Language*, second edition, London 1981, pp. x–xi.

<sup>80</sup> *Catholicism and the World Order*, pp. 31–32.

tive' metaphysics of *Individuals* or *The Bounds of Sense* to the actively prescriptive agenda of *Reasons and Persons*. Where the former limited itself to formal properties of our existing conceptual scheme of the world, disavowing any possibility or intention of 'dreaming up alternative structures',<sup>81</sup> the latter takes as its object our sense of natural identity and seeks to demonstrate—to practical effect—that we are typically in error about it: 'philosophers should not only interpret our beliefs; when they are false, they should *change* them.'<sup>82</sup> The changes proposed by Parfit, the most original thinker of the younger generation, are stiff medicine: nothing less than the dissolution of traditional ideas of the person into a succession of contingently associated states, with no more necessary unity or continuity than nations or parties—something closer to the divisible segments of the amoeba or the mutable referents of the SFIO than to the integrity of the person as normally understood.<sup>83</sup> The dismantling of identity is a familiar theme in contemporary Continental philosophy. The startling feature of *Reasons and Persons* is that it presents a utilitarian analogue to the leading theme of post-structuralism. Its intellectual background is not an idealist meditation on the instability of language, so much as a materialist response to the arrival of medical transplants and genetic engineering. In this world, the separateness of persons upheld by theorists of natural rights, but ignored in their different ways by Bentham and Buddha, is to be set aside. The ethical upshot of Parfit's radical reduction of identity is no Lyotardian hedonism or Nietzschean heroics of the present, but the need for an unflinching 'moral mathematics' of the future; since, under threat of nuclear annihilation, 'the next few centuries will be the most important in human history.'<sup>84</sup>

The prominence of *Reasons and Persons*, in the main due to the disturbing force and strangeness of its central arguments, also owes something to its particular combination of an extended account of the self with a sustained view of the moral life. For these two preoccupations have characterized much contemporary philosophical writing, typically in tacit reference to each other, but rarely joined so expressly and directly. On the one hand, there has been a major cluster of literature on problems of agency and identity. Here the field has divided with renewed sharpness between theorists of meaning and exponents of causation. The strongest attack on all naturalist accounts of the self has come from Charles Taylor, for whom the constitutive feature of human agency is self-interpretation against a background of evaluation, that is, within a cultural space defined by distinctions of worth. Identity is not to be conceived as a locus of performance but of signifi-

<sup>81</sup> See Strawson's remarks in conversation with Bryan Magee, *Modern British Philosophy*, second edition, London 1986, pp. 157–58. Magee comments in his introduction to this collection of dialogues, originally published in 1971, that it probably represented 'the last attempt that will be possible to discuss contemporary British philosophy solely in terms of British philosophers and their work,' since 'British philosophy no longer seems autonomous in the way it once was—indeed, it seems on the way to becoming the chief province in a territory whose capital is elsewhere.' p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford 1984, p. x.

<sup>83</sup> 'Persons are like nations, clubs or political parties.' Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 453–54, 351.

cance: irreducible to behavioural explanation, it can only be understood hermeneutically. As such, it is unamenable to calculations of utility. The project of explaining human action scientifically not only misses its target; it must itself be interpreted as a sublimated modern sequel to ancient ideals of self-denial as the path to spiritual freedom.<sup>85</sup> At the opposite pole, Ted Honderich's *Theory of Determinism* offers a massive statement of the case for a causal account of action grounded in the advances of neurophysiology. Reviewing the whole philosophical tradition of debates over free will, Honderich concludes that no variant of compatibilism (doctrines that seek to reconcile determination and self-origination of our acts) is defensible. A full determinism, threatening as it may seem to unreflective hopes of life, ought not to inspire either dejection or defiance, but rather renunciation of impossible desires, and contentment with those which are within our reach as common members of nature.<sup>86</sup> The stoic overtones here confirm at any rate temperamental affinities between the deeper forms of classical and modern naturalism.

### Problems of Identity

A third position can be found in the work of Richard Wollheim, whose view of identity derives essentially from psychoanalysis. Traditionally, Freud's thought has often been used to mediate the claims of meaning and cause. In moderate hermeneutic versions of his doctrine, such as that of Ricoeur, the emphasis falls on analysis as interpretation rather than explanation, language more than biology. This is the reading sympathetic to Taylor. Wollheim, by contrast, has always stayed closer to Freud's own conception of his work, as an explanatory theory of psychic life whose ultimate foundation lay in the mechanisms of physical drives. At the same time, this greater materialist inclination is joined to a far more holistic view of identity than that of Parfit—to whom the title of Wollheim's central work may be taken as a rejoinder. *The Thread of Life* takes as its organizing theme the 'process of living', whose phenomenology is constituted by the experience of the continuity of our mental states, dispositions and activities. Wollheim brings to these a set of categories directly drawn from Freud and Klein, illustrating his accounts of memory or phantasy with the first case-histories of psychoanalysis.<sup>87</sup> Where Parfit urges the emancipating force of a view of the person as divisible, even interchangeable, for Wollheim the greatest evils that can be suffered—loss of friendship, madness and death—are those that in different ways cut the thread of living. Something of the same concern can be seen in his major study in substantive aesthetics, *Painting as an Art*, which founds the intersubjective intelligibility of painting (a process that requires, Wollheim argues, retrieval by the spectator of the original meaning

<sup>85</sup> *Human Agency and Language—Philosophical Papers*, Vol. I, pp. 112–13. A Canadian, Taylor can—with some latitude—be included here by reason of his long association with Oxford.

<sup>86</sup> *A Theory of Determinism*, London 1988, pp. 493–96. Honderich is also Canadian by origin (so too his former colleague G.A. Cohen).

<sup>87</sup> *The Thread of Life*, London 1984, pp. 130–61.

the work had for the painter) on its evolutionary success in finding the thread of a continuous public.<sup>88</sup>

Philosophical absorption with the problems of identity has necessarily led to closer relations with different strands of psychology. If the steeping of Wollheim's work in psychoanalytic thought is a special case, analytic philosophy generally displayed a wider interest in Freud in this period—which also, however, saw a transformation in the position of psychoanalysis within British culture at large. From being a somewhat secluded specialist enclave it became a familiar part of lay reference, as Freud's writings achieved belated mass diffusion and a broad influence across a range of intellectual disciplines, with an especial attraction for feminist currents within them. Paradoxically, however, public breakthrough coincided in many ways with professional recession. In its relative isolation up to the late sixties, psychoanalysis had enjoyed a rare fertility in England; its division between Freudian, Kleinian and Middle Groups generating a richer intellectual history, with more independent talent—Riviere, Bowlby, Fairbairn, Winnicott, Laing, Bion and others—than either the USA or France. Once it entered into common circulation, however, Winnicott or Laing becoming staples of paperback display and Klein impersonated on the West End stage, its previous diversity and vitality seem to have lessened. If post-Kleinian work, derived mainly from Bion, has been most visible, it has also shifted furthest away from a general theory, towards a sympathetic phenomenology, of mental disorder.<sup>89</sup> There were larger reasons for this change. The evolution of perhaps the sharpest mind within the British school, Charles Rycroft, records some of them. Initially a leading member of the British Psychoanalytic Society, critical stocktaking during the sixties led him to the conviction that it was too inbred and undemanding an intellectual milieu, and that psychoanalysis as a whole was unwarrantably indifferent not only to the findings of experimental psychology or ethology, but also the insights of poetic intelligence and often the claims of commonsense.<sup>90</sup> By the late seventies, he had left the Society and upturned one of the central pillars of classical Freudian theory in *The Innocence of Dreams* (1979), treating these not as akin to neurotic symptoms born of repression, but as nocturnal expressions of the involuntary imagination once conceived by Jean Paul or Coleridge. Significantly, the most interesting account of dreams to come from an experimental psychologist, Liam Hudson's *Night-Life* (1985), draws directly on Rycroft's ideas. Meanwhile, the effect of such a reversal within psychoanalysis itself has been reinforced by philosophical critiques from without. Focusing on the scientific status of Freud's theories, Frank Cioffi concluded that these were procedurally

<sup>88</sup> *Painting as an Art*, London 1987, p. 357—a work expressly concerned with causal explanation, whose centrepiece is a remarkable revaluation of Poussin, set in effect against Blunt's great study of him.

<sup>89</sup> For friendly insight into this school, see Michael Rustin, 'Post-Kleinian Psychoanalysis and the Post-Modern', *MLA* 173, January–February 1989, a writer who has consistently sought to articulate psychoanalytic concerns with wider cultural and political issues.

<sup>90</sup> See *Psychoanalysis and Beyond*, London 1985, pp. 119–27, 204–207, which contains a series of crisp vignettes of leading British analysts.

untestable, and Adolf Grunbaum that they were testable but incompatible with therapeutic evidence.<sup>91</sup> In another register, Gellner's readily executed but deeply engaged polemic, *The Psychoanalytic Movement*, moves beyond substantive attack on the main doctrines of psychoanalysis, to propose a sweeping cultural explanation for their social impact, in what is certainly the most powerful single attempt so far to situate Freud in the wider history of European ideas.

But if psychoanalysis is 'hardly well', in Grunbaum's temperate phrase, its principal rival has been in no better condition. For native positivist psychology has in the same period suffered more than its own share of embarrassment, with the discovery of the fraud perpetrated by the patron authority of IQ studies in England, Sir Cyril Burt, and the misadventures of his student Hans Eysenck, 'the most influential of living British psychologists'.<sup>92</sup> Champion of behaviour therapy and author of a popular library of works deriving social and individual patterns—inequalities of race and class, differences of intelligence and personality, propensities to criminality or to smoking—from biologically inherited endowments, Eysenck gave the ultimate piquant illustration of the affinities between scientism and superstition by flirting with astrology.<sup>93</sup> No philosophy of identity, however resolutely reductive its programme, could find a reliable basis from quarters like this. At a time when the gap between the overt concerns of philosophy and psychology often narrowed, the actual support the latter could provide the former—whether it conceived the self as source of meaning, or nexus of cause—ironically looked, if anything, more precarious.

### Ethics and the Social

Alongside the new concern with identity came a revival of interest in ethics. Where once there had been little more than formal analysis of 'the language of morals', as so many familiar locutions employed in more or less humdrum situations, there now emerged rival accounts of the substance of ethical living itself. Broadly, three contrasting positions can be distinguished. For Bernard Williams, in a series of interventions, ethics are never isolate. Moral considerations always mingle among other kinds of significant valuation on one side, and are interwoven with accidents of fortune on the other: the luck of character or occasion. The notion of the purely moral therefore betrays 'a powerful misconception of life', that converts everything

---

<sup>91</sup> Frank Cioffi, 'Freud and the Idea of a Pseudo-Science', in R. Borger and F. Cioffi, eds., *Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences*, Cambridge 1970, pp. 471–99; Adolf Grunbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, Berkeley 1984, pp. 159–72 (argument from spontaneous remission).

<sup>92</sup> 'A world figure . . . no psychologist since Freud has had such an impact on contemporary thinking as Eysenck', in the words of his admiring colleague H.B. Gibson; *Hans Eysenck—The Man and his Work*, London 1981, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> After *The Biological Basis of Personality* (1967), *Race, Intelligence and Education* (1971), *The Inequality of Man* (1973), *Crime and Personality* (1977), came the startling news of Eysenck's organization of a colloquium of horoscopists at the Maudsley in 1979, followed by his plea for 'cosmobiology'—the study of extraterrestrial influences on human life—in *Astrology* (1982). Even Gibson quails at this enthusiasm; *Hans Eysenck*, pp. 204–13.

into obligation—whether that obligation is interpreted in Kantian or Benthamite fashion. Conceived as such, morality is an ‘institution we would be better off without’.<sup>94</sup> In similar vein, Wollheim has rejected the view that ‘morality is ultimate or overriding’, in favour of an ethics that conjoins obligation and value. Here, however, value is identified psychoanalytically, as a projection of archaic bliss grounded in a universal human nature<sup>95</sup>—a basis refused by Williams, for whom the only possible objective foundation for morality would be a gradual social convergence on a common way of life, from which however future generations could well depart.

In these critiques of rule-based ethics, a vitalist strain predominates. In the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, a much more extended and vehement attack on Kantian and utilitarian ideas of right conduct—treated as equally misguided legacies of the Enlightenment—is mounted, but from the alternative of virtue rather than value. *After Virtue* presents a history of successive moral codes, from Homeric to Modern times, that seeks not only to show how each was rooted in a specific social order, but to trace the decline of what was once a coherent ethical tradition—Aristotelian and then Mediaeval—into contemporary spiritual chaos. MacIntyre’s theorization of the virtues, as qualities anchored in the culture of particular communities and demonstrated across the unity of a human life, is strongly anti-atomistic in intent. Yet its hostility to liberal individualism, reproached with sanctioning any subjective ethical stance, perversely ends by reproducing relativism at a higher level—that of the localized community, as opposed to the disinherited individual. The attempt to insist on both the historical rootedness of the Nicomachean Ethics in the classical *polis*, and its perennial superior merits in late industrial civilization, inevitably issues into defensive paradox, one that can only be sustained by what—contrary to appearance—is in effect a treatment of the past as parable rather than chronicle.<sup>96</sup>

Formally similar in strategy, and overlapping in outlook, Charles Taylor’s *Source of the Self* also pursues an extended historical enquiry to contemporary ethical conclusions. But here the object of critical reconstruction is the formation of modern identity, from the time of Plato to that of Celan, and its treatment is on a more ambitious and richer scale. The aim of the work is not an indictment of the moral wilderness of the present, but on the contrary a demonstration of the variety of its underground springs. The sources of the modern self, whose inwardness was first adumbrated in Augustinian Christianity, include the Enlightenment ideals of the dignity of science and the Romantic valencies of nature, conceptions of universal benevolence and of personal epiphany—that is, the still active legacies of theism, naturalism, expressivism. Where for MacIntyre these are precisely

<sup>94</sup> *Moral Luck*, Cambridge 1981, pp. 20–39; *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, London 1985, pp. 180, 194–96.

<sup>95</sup> *The Thread of Life*, pp. 213, 221–23.

<sup>96</sup> Of which the famous ending, awaiting the mission of a modern St Benedict for ‘the new dark ages which are already upon us’, provides an appropriate illustration, *After Virtue*, London 1979, p. 263.



proof of the incoherence of modernity, shattered debris of incompatible traditions strewn as if by some metaphysical disaster, for Taylor they form an indispensable complex of resources for the higher morality demanded by it. In Hegelian style, each is suspended and integrated within an ontological narrative that culminates in the quest for a transcendent order, apprehensible through the visions of modernist art, and readmissible as the shapes of historical hope into radical politics.

If these explorations in a temporalized ethics have a religious background—Anglican and Catholic, respectively—moral theory assumes a quite different cast in James Griffin's *Well-Being*. But it too starts from a strong statement of the embeddedness of the ethical, in contrasting ways common to all these philosophies. But here the standpoint is critically utilitarian, and its focus the immanent relationships between prudential and moral values. In Griffin's version, utility becomes the fulfilment of informed desires, its maximization a rational enhancement of well-being. Prudence instructs us to pursue those ends—for example accomplishment, autonomy, understanding, enjoyment—which will confer well-being, and morality can be conceived as a set of demands overlapping but not coinciding with it. A good life will be so at once in a prudential and moral sense. But, taking two classically contrasted values, while liberty is a principle of prudence, equality—because it involves comparison between lives—is a dictate of morality, indeed 'in a way *the* moral value'. The political consequences of this ethic are no more than silhouetted. Sufficiently, however, to condemn present patterns of material distribution as 'glaringly obsolete', and to suggest their revision by an alternative principle, normal in families: from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs.<sup>97</sup>

### Political Philosophy

In all these bodies of work, politics looms at the edge of the ethics in question. In political philosophy itself, meanwhile, analogous changes were occurring. Peter Laslett, introducing in 1956 what was to be a series of volumes entitled *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, declared in a famous pronouncement that for the time being 'political philosophy is dead'.<sup>98</sup> All the contributors to that collection, headed by Oakeshott, were British. By 1967, the editors saw some signs of a revival, if one largely limited to a 'holding operation' against the prevalent forces of positivism in linguistic philosophy and behavioural social science. Five years later, they decided that such verdicts were 'no longer applicable'.<sup>99</sup> By 1979, the fifth and final volume was recording the 'most welcome happenings' in political thought 'with enthusiasm'. The principal occasion for such satisfaction was the appearance in the early seventies of John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, which rendered defunct Berlin's dictum earlier in the series that no commanding

---

<sup>97</sup> *Well-Being*, Oxford 1986, pp. 239, 303.

<sup>98</sup> *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Vol. I, London 1956, p. vii.

<sup>99</sup> The second and third volumes (1962 and 1967) were edited by Laslett and Runciman; for the fourth (1972) they were joined by Quentin Skinner; the fifth (1979) was produced by Laslett and an American colleague, James Fishkin.

work of political theory had appeared in the twentieth century. Next in importance was the arrival of Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. The revival had, however, been essentially American—a change registered in the contributors to the collection itself, of whom only one was now British.

The renewal of political theory in this period, like that of philosophy at large, was indeed accompanied by a new dominance of US production. In this case, the ascendancy was for a time overwhelming—as the neo-contractarian structures of Rawls and Nozick became the obsessive centre of reference of most of the discipline. However, even at the height of this influence, there was a discernible difference in the climate of professional opinion in the two countries. In the United States, Rawls's delphic masterpiece was generally received as the standpoint of a moderate, liberal left, within a field whose centre of gravity lay well to the right of it. There, Nozick's truculent postures scarcely marked the outer bounds of neo-conservatism, where older and wintrier theories like those of James Buchanan and the Virginia School stood guard. In Britain, on the other hand, Rawls was more generally taken as a figure of the centre; in a culture where the utilitarian traditions he rejected were stronger, his critics were typically more radical. Here the range of philosophical outlook was several degrees to the left of the American. Dummert's forthright views were not an isolated case. Entirely opposed in their accounts of human agency, it is all the more noticeable that Taylor and Honderich have largely coincided in political conviction—Taylor a founding spirit of the New Left, Honderich a trenchant critic of the silent violences of liberal society.<sup>100</sup> The moral philosophies of MacIntyre and Griffin may be antithetical, but their social attitudes to the inequalities of capitalism are quite close. Wollheim has gone out of his way, in even such an apparently distant context as his pictorial theory, to affirm a lifelong attachment to socialism.

Within political theory itself, the pattern of British discussion has thus predictably also been to the left of the American. One significant theme running through it, for obvious reasons largely absent in the USA, has been the fate and future of socialism. Alan Ryan's *Property and Political Theory* (1984), which traces two distinct conceptions of ownership—instrumental versus expressive—from Locke and Rousseau onwards, concludes with a critical balance sheet of the respective expectations of Mill and Marx that the 'futurity of the working class' would assure a transition to socialism: hopes attractive and reasonable in their time, but since disappointed by events, as work becomes less arduous and property less important. John Dunn's *Politics of Socialism* (1984) engages more widely with the record of the labour movement and of socialist thought, in both social-democratic and communist variants; combining a severe judgement on their practical and intellectual failures to date with an unusual argument as to why an impetus—at once economic and cultural—towards socialism

<sup>100</sup> See his important essay on the moral comparability of acting and failing to act in politics, 'Our Omissions and Their Violence', *Violence for Equality*, London 1980, pp. 58–100.

nevertheless remains inherent in the pressures of advanced capitalism itself. Dunn's principal charge against the existent politics of socialism is the weakness, if not worse, of its understanding of democracy. This is the deficiency David Held's recent work seeks to remedy. *Models of Democracy* (1987) develops a historical typology of successive conceptions of democratic governments, in a way that owes much to Macpherson; but it goes on to propose the institutional outlines of a socialism that would marry liberal reserve towards political power with Marxist suspicion of economic power, by according a right of 'democratic autonomy'—equal capacity of individuals to determine their life conditions—to its citizens. A concern with the relationship between liberalism and socialism is, in effect, a common strand of all these works.

### Social Justice Beyond Rawls

On the heights of political philosophy in the more traditional sense, the situation is similar. The central figure here, Brian Barry, started out in the mid sixties with a work aiming to show the advantages of bringing the technical rigour of analytic philosophy, on one side, and economic models of political life, on the other, to classic normative issues of the discipline. In keeping with the times, the authority of Austin or Downs was invoked more or less uncritically in this enterprise, which hesitated between a formal survey of different species of social justification and actual commentary on the arrangements so justified. Yet for all its conventional air, the conclusion of *Political Argument* was a penetrating, prescient attack on the founding version of the public-choice theory that was later to become the dominant *Staatslehre* of the radical Right in the USA—Buchanan and Tullock's *Calculus of Consent*.<sup>201</sup> Barry then moved to the explanatory side of the discipline, with an original two-handed critique of the contrasting theories of democracy advanced by Downs (also Olson) and Parsons—'economic' and 'sociological' accounts of its operation whose ideological pedigree, he argues, went back to Bentham and Coleridge. *Economists, Sociologists and Democracy* (1970) found the modern versions of both these traditions—theorizing democratic stability in terms either of utility-maximization or value-integration—basically wanting: the one unable to explain why anyone bothers to vote at all, the other why there should be any need for an ultimate coercive authority. While judging the deductive economic models of Downs and Olson rather less sterile than the circular culturalism of Parsons, Barry pointed to Barrington Moore's historical account of the relations between state structures and social classes as an avenue of explanation escaping the nineteenth-century dichotomy they repeated.

Such interventions, however sharp their analytical edge, remained fairly reticent in political statement. *The Liberal Theory of Justice* (1973), published as class conflicts were unseating the Heath government, marked a dramatic change of register. Amidst the mountain of blandly decorous literature on Rawls's theory of justice, this stands out as the most telling and passionate rejoinder to it. In a polemic that

<sup>201</sup> *Political Argument*, London 1965, pp. 242–85.

succeeds in being scathingly respectful, Barry taxed Rawls with uncritical acceptance of the market as a mechanism of social distribution, and the nation-state as a unit of collective decision; complacency towards domestic inequalities of wealth and power in the USA, taken for a 'nearly just' society; and blindness towards international inequalities, conjured away by draping the device of the 'veil of ignorance' across just one—advanced industrial—community. The Difference Principle, Barry charges, apparently capable of bringing succour to the least fortunate within such a state, effectively issued into little more than a placebo: 'not since Locke's theory of property have such potentially radical premises been used as the foundation for something so little disturbing to the status quo.'<sup>22</sup> Unaware of the central influence of working-class action in diminishing the weight of injustice in Western societies through welfare legislation, Rawls was in many of his background assumptions close to an unreconstructed liberalism of Gladstonian stamp.

At the close of the eighties, Barry's own magnum opus has started to appear. The first instalment of a projected three-volume *Treatise on Social Justice* encapsulates the history of reflection on justice, from Plato to the present, in two fundamental alternatives. Justice has either been conceived as the dictate of rational prudence, in circumstances where social cooperation is essential to civil existence; or as the outcome of rational agreement, in conditions where bargaining power cannot be used for advantage. Barry dubs these rival conceptions 'justice as mutual cooperation' and 'justice as impartiality'. Hume and Rawls—opposite as proto-utilitarian and neo-contractualist—nevertheless each attempted to combine both these ideas in their respective theories of justice. Hume employed the former to explain how the institutions of private property arose out of rational self-interest, and the latter to account for the sentiments of extended sympathy that then sustained them. Likewise Rawls constructs his 'original position', from which a just society is chosen, out of the self-interested calculations of those who cannot know what their particular lot would be in one; but then advocates social arrangements for his eventual position which must appeal to moral principles beyond maximin outcomes. For Barry, both amalgams are incoherent: Hume has no answer to the 'sensible knave' who ignores the claims of sympathy in a civilized society, while Rawls must resort to smuggling back ethical motives as 'higher-order' interests of the actors in his original position. Barry's treatment of Rawls is far warmer than in his earlier polemic, and in one crucial respect he reverses himself directly, to underwrite what he had previously described as the Panglossian assumption of the 'chain connexion'—roughly, that anything which improves the lot of one group will also enhance that of all others—behind the Difference Principle, which now receives his qualified approval.<sup>23</sup> But the power of his attack on the overall framework of Rawlsian theory is even strengthened, as he extends his critique of its stoppage before international inequalities to longer-run issues of ecological injustice, affecting many future generations.

<sup>22</sup> *The Liberal Theory of Justice*, Oxford 1973, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Theories of Justice*, London 1989, p. 231; presumably also p. 4.

*Theories of Justice* ends by proclaiming the primacy of impartiality over mutual advantage, and arguing that it is possible to attain it—that is, reach rational agreement about social ends—through unimpaired debate. The stress here is very close to characteristic themes of Habermas, whom Barry, anachronistically monoglot in reference, ignores. Unlike Habermas, however, he not only seeks to specify the empirical conditions for—or barriers to—the ‘circumstances of impartiality’ in existing societies, but promises institutional recommendations for the achievement of economic equity within and between nations. It remains to be seen whether the philosophical ambition he announces, of ultimately incorporating justice as mutually beneficial cooperation as a ‘special case’ of justice as impartiality, will be more successful than the hybrid unions he has criticized. But the political direction of the *Treatise* as a whole is already laid out in the title of his inaugural lecture at the LSE: ‘The Continuing Relevance of Socialism.’<sup>204</sup> In a withering attack on the market failures and individualist fallacies of the Thatcher–Reagan years, Barry proposes collective control—as opposed to equality—of life conditions as the central principle of socialism, and the practice of social insurance as its major embodiment to date.

### Analytical Marxism

Tension between these two conceptions—popular sovereignty or material equality—recurs, as it happens, in another body of writing whose intellectual origins lie to the left of Barry’s. The prolific output of the school of Analytical Marxism has ranged across economics, sociology, history and political philosophy. Its originating work was G.A. Cohen’s reconstruction of Marx’s theory of history. In its subsequent flowering, as John Roemer’s theory of exploitation became central to it, capitalism has been mainly discussed (from a range of different positions) as a system of social inequality. In England, Cohen—whose election to the Oxford chair once occupied by Berlin suggests some of the changes of this period—has contributed to these debates, principally with a deadly side-blow to Nozick’s theory of property.<sup>205</sup> But the memorable conclusion of *Karl Marx’s Theory of History—A Defence* (1978) does not rest its case against capitalism on the issue of equality, whether national or international. Its indictment concentrates rather on the systematic compulsion to prefer increased output to decreased labour-time that distinguishes capitalism from all other social orders: ‘the economic form most able to relieve toil is the least disposed to do so.’<sup>206</sup> Socialism, by contrast, would for the first time empower producers to choose between goods and leisure. Here it is not social insurance but free time that is the practical touchstone of a better society. But the principle coincides with Barry’s: socialism is conceived in either case as collective reassertion of control over the basic conditions of economic life. These conclusions leave two issues

<sup>204</sup> Contained in Robert Skidelsky, ed., *Thatcherism*, London 1988, pp. 143–58.

<sup>205</sup> ‘Freedom, Justice and Capitalism’, *NLR* 125, March–April 1981, pp. 3–16.

<sup>206</sup> *Karl Marx’s Theory of History—A Defence*, Oxford 1978, p. 306. Cohen stresses that this would stand as an indictment of American capitalism ‘even if the United States were a society of substantial equality, isolated from the rest of the world’—that is, classless and unimperialist.

evidently unresolved. What would be the institutional forms of a socialized sovereignty, and what would be the relative place of equality within them? It is these questions that David Miller's *Market, State and Community* addresses, in the most developed attempt to date to establish—against objections of the radical Right and sceptical Left alike—the normative foundations of a market socialism, in which cooperative enterprises leasing socially owned capital would compete with each other, and differential returns to individual desert flow within distributive boundaries set by a strongly constitutionalist state. The aim of this conception is to reconcile autonomy and equity with efficiency, by rendering the form of the market itself a consciously chosen economic device, the 'expression of collective will'.<sup>207</sup> In these related emphases, a political theory remote from that of a still recent past has been emerging. Philosophy, apparently the least likely of British disciplines to display a radical temper, in fact registered some of the most various shifts of all towards one.

## 6. Economics

In its classical origins economics was, as is well known, intimately connected with philosophy in Britain. Smith, professing Moral Philosophy, and Mill, expounding Political Economy, embodied the association of the two disciplines. The link between them persisted through the neo-classical revolution, Sidgwick joining ethics and economics in a single corpus. Keynes's own intellectual background lay in logic, and at the height of his career he characteristically recalled the philosophical vocation of the economist. In the postwar epoch, however, as technical specialization proceeded apace in each discipline, contact between them dwindled away all but completely. Econometrics and ordinary-language analysis had little to say to each other during the arid fifties. This distance too now altered, as certain common traits came to mark the two fields, and exchange was renewed between them.

More directly than any other area of thought, economics was altered by the upheaval in its environment in these years. During the long boom, the theoretical consensus throughout the Atlantic world was Keynesian, as counter-cyclical management of demand became normal government practice, appearing to assure steady growth of prosperity at high levels of employment. After premonitory signs of trouble in the late sixties, the sudden onset of global recession in the early seventies, bringing the novel combination of sharp falls in output with steep rises in price level, undermined this orthodoxy. A series of radical challenges to Keynesianism rapidly occupied the front of the stage. Virtually all of these came from the United States. But if the 'counter-revolution' in economics has been essentially an

---

<sup>207</sup> *Market, State and Community*, Oxford 1989, pp. 220–23. For all its rigour of argument and ease of manner, Miller's book combines a level-headed moral realism with a certain contextual amnesia—as if its author, in constructing an avowedly national model, had deliberately chosen to forget the encompassing international order of capitalism, where on his own premisses cooperatives could not hope to survive.

American phenomenon, this has itself reflected the dominance of the USA within the discipline at large. Out of the hundred names included in the standard survey of *Great Economists Since Keynes*, three-quarters were American by birth or base, compared with less than a fifth from Britain; among those living, the proportions are still more pronounced, the USA outnumbering the UK ten to one.<sup>108</sup> Within this American ascendancy, the tide of professional opinion swung steadily to the right: the major alternatives to Keynesian doctrines that now gained influence were without exception outspokenly conservative.

Most prominent was, of course, monetarism *stricto sensu*. Milton Friedman's presidential address to the American Economic Association of late 1967, which appropriately opened the period, attacked the conventional view—codified as the Phillips curve—that there was any long-run trade-off between employment and inflation. The price level was fundamentally set by the supply of money, and fiscal expansion could only accelerate inflation, briefly lifting output and cutting real wages before labour adjusted its claims upwards in compensation, thereby restoring 'the natural rate of unemployment' inherent in any given national economy.<sup>109</sup> Repeated counter-cyclical stimulation of demand only generated even greater anticipation of price rises, without corresponding rises in output or employment—hence, inevitably, stagflation. The remedy to this evil was the tightest possible control of the money supply, preferably enforced by law rather than merely pursued by government. Monetarism in Friedman's version drove the largest breach in neo-Keynesian positions. But it was soon outdone by a more radical rejection of them. The rational-expectations theory formulated by Lucas and Sargent denied that there could be any interval at all between fiscal expansion and wage inflation, by modelling labour with the same immediate capacity to foresee the effects of government policy as capital. Markets always tend towards equilibrium, and pump priming can have not even the most short-run effect in creating jobs. The upshot is the famous axiom that there is no such thing as 'involuntary unemployment': the jobless choose to be so, preferring leisure to work.

Lucas's doctrine in effect dismisses macroeconomics altogether: since markets always clear, there is no distinct role for theoretical aggregation. Friedman's, allowing for delay in the adjustment of lay expectations and superior predictive powers to the economist, retains that in

<sup>108</sup> Mark Blaug, *Great Economists Since Keynes*, London 1985. The selection of those included may not be quite as consensual as the author makes out; but compiled by an American in England, it is likely to be balanced in this respect. One point it confirms is the high degree of mobility generally among economists—a third of those based in the USA have been immigrants, just under a third in the UK. For present purposes, greater number of working years so far spent in one or the other country can be taken as the criterion of who should be counted where—e.g. Coase or Lerner in the US group, Morishima or Sen in the UK group.

<sup>109</sup> 'The Role of Monetary Policy', *American Economic Review*, March 1968, pp. 8–17; presidential address to the American Economic Association, 27 December 1967. 'The first and most important lesson that history teaches us about what monetary policy can do—and it is a lesson of the most profound importance—is that monetary policy can prevent money itself from being a major source of economic disturbance.' p. 12.

simplified form. An exclusive derivation of inflation from increases in monetary aggregates, however, leaves its ultimate causes unexplained—what determines the latter? The public-choice theory developed by Buchanan and Tullock filled this gap. Projecting the neoclassical analytic framework from the market onto the state, the 'new political economy' of the Virginia School treated governments as essentially self-interested maximizers like firms or households, rather than the benevolently impartial authorities Keynes had assumed. Swollen budgets and abundant emissions become the natural choices of public officials, as politicians seek clienteles for re-election, and bureaucrats resources for appropriation. Keynes himself, concerned with the multiplier effects of state expenditure in general, had been notoriously indifferent to its particular destinations—digging holes or building pyramids would serve the purpose. His successors, however, had stressed the public goods of a positive character—repairing 'market failures' or private externalities—that it could provide. Here the theory of property rights associated with Coase and Demsetz stepped in, arguing that it was often essentially under-definition of private entitlements and liabilities that led to the costly illusion of a requirement for public goods at all. Finally, completing the barrage from the right, the theory of spontaneous order perfected by Hayek in his American years pointed to the restraints on trade represented by labour unions, as an independent and endemic source of inflation from below—wrongly discounted by the schools of Friedman or Lucas—that needed to be broken as well. At the same time, far beyond this, Hayek's oeuvre furnished an encompassing philosophical carapace—cultural and historical as well as economic and political—for every technical variety of the case for a deregulated capitalism. A great deal of more traditional work, of moderate quasi-Keynesian stamp, continued meanwhile to be done, of course. But in this altered climate, even such eminences as Arrow or Samuelson lost centrality, while rare figures to the left of them like Leontief became entirely isolated.

### The Crisis in Keynesian Economics

The British scene has differed significantly. In the first half of the century, English economics had possessed its own strong and distinctive native tradition. The version of marginalism that Marshall developed was pragmatic in cast and social in concern. A focus on the partial equilibrium of particular markets, rather than general equilibrium of all of them; a price theory embracing costs of production as well as consumer utility; a social policy favouring progressive taxation, but discountenancing union militancy; an industrial outlook already anxious at Britain's lagging productivity and loss of competitive advantage—these typified Marshall's outlook. After him, the Cambridge legacy bifurcated. Roughly speaking, Pigou developed the side that was sensitive to issues of distribution, his exploration of the possibilities for divergence between private and social costs founding what was to become welfare economics; Keynes took over the interest in production, inaugurating what later became macroeconomics with what—despite its title—amounted to a pragmatically limited theory of employment, born of the Depression, that effectively set aside questions of competition or productivity. If Keynes's departures from



theoretical orthodoxy occasioned sharp contention in Cambridge, his practical recommendations for the Slump still commanded widespread agreement among his critics or elders there. At the LSE an alternative circle emerged in the thirties, under the guidance of Robbins and with the presence of Hayek, that was more alive to influences from Lausanne and Vienna—the variants of marginalism stemming from Walras and Menger, and which did resist Keynesian recipes ferociously, in the name of liberal orthodoxy. But it remained relatively loose-knit and lost much of its edge during the war; Robbins himself, now a convert to Keynes's programme for employment, working with him in his final mission to secure an American loan for peacetime recovery.<sup>120</sup> The postwar settlement, formally dedicated to social welfare and full employment, presided over by Labour and confirmed by the Conservative governments of the fifties, consecrated the hegemony of Cambridge traditions in the wider political culture. Within the profession itself, henceforward greatly expanded, there was probably no country where Keynesian tenets enjoyed such general assent.

Economic decline, evident from the sixties onwards, provoked little searching response in this community—Marshall's original disquiet on this score had been all too successfully displaced by Keynes. Nor did the first signs of impending world recession, towards the end of the decade, ruffle it. In the autumn of 1971, just as a feverish commodities boom was about to collapse, giving way to the worst slump since 1929, Samuel Brittan—himself an adherent to the monetarism already waxing in the USA—submitted a questionnaire to some 120 leading economists in the UK. *Is There an Economic Consensus?* found that there was indeed one, what Brittan termed a 'liberal orthodoxy' subscribed to by three-quarters of his respondents: that is, a belief in market competition and the pursuit of individual self-interest as the mainsprings of growth, but not as necessarily conducive to an equitable distribution of income or adequate supply of public goods—which required various forms of corrective state intervention. Monetary discipline, Brittan noted with regret, was not deemed sufficient for the conduct of government by his respondents; global demand-management was firmly upheld. Worse, 'an impressionistic judgement is that their egalitarian concern is greater than among economists in most other Western countries'—perhaps a 'form of the puritan legacy'.<sup>121</sup> The profile of British economists at this date, in other words, testified principally to the continuity of native tradition.

Three years later, amidst oil crisis and miners' strike, John Hicks published *The Crisis in Keynesian Economics*. The most original and versatile mind of the generation younger than Keynes, Hicks had started out as a member of the LSE milieu, where he was distinguished by his early interest—working back from Pareto to Walras—in the general equilibrium tradition of Lausanne, at a time when his colleagues were more attracted to Austrian economics. By the mid thirties he had taken his distance from the untempered free-market faith of Robbins and Hayek, and formalized

<sup>120</sup> For this trajectory, see Robbins's relatively candid *Autobiography of an Economist*, London 1971, pp. 121–222.

<sup>121</sup> *Is There an Economic Consensus?*, London 1973, p. 23.

Keynes's theory to great and lasting effect, in the most celebrated of all reviews of it. 'Mr Keynes and the Classics'.<sup>122</sup> *Value and Capital* (1939) sought to reconcile the stability conditions of general-equilibrium analysis with the Keynesian themes of time, expectations and money that Walras had excluded—laying the foundations for the 'neo-classical synthesis' of micro- and macro-economics developed by Samuelson after the war. Hicks himself was reserved about this extension to his work, expressing antipathy to the market-idealizing and econometric biases of the US profession in this period.<sup>123</sup> In *Capital and Growth* (1965) he dealt a radical blow to these by developing his fundamental distinction between 'flexprice' and 'fixprice' markets, the former—in which prices are regulated by supply and demand, assumed as universal in standard theory—now being largely restricted to primary commodities, the latter—in which producers determine prices—accounting in reality for most of modern manufacturing.

Hicks's verdict on Keynesianism in the hour of its crisis thus came from one whose record of independent native authority had few equals. It was very different from those popular on the other side of the Atlantic. Hicks singled out three central deficiencies in Keynes's *General Theory*, which called not for its rejection, but its reconstruction. Keynes had overlooked the importance of surplus stocks in fixprice markets as a condition for the operation of his multiplier (or unusually low prices in the flexprice sector), whose absence could thwart it; he had assumed liquidity preference was typically harmful for investment, because he had neglected the question of its quality for that of its quantity; and he had failed to understand that the stickiness of wages, which, he noted, was not essentially due to trade-union pressures but rather to the forces of customary continuity in fixprice markets, embodied notions of 'fairness' that were in good measure a condition of efficient employment. Keynesian fiscal expansion could thus indeed generate inflation without job creation, as monetarist critics had argued. But the worst effect of such inflation was a far cry from their obsession with flexprice models. By unsettling the basis of all industrial relations and tax/transfer payments, it tore up custom by the roots—with direct consequences for economic efficiency, not to speak of social solidarity. Economists should henceforth be 'aware, very fully aware, that prices have a social function as well as an allocative function.'<sup>124</sup>

Hicks's own work in this period turned with increasing concentration to the dynamics of market exchange and capital accumulation. Dissatisfied with what he had come to regard as the unduly static mould of his earlier work, for all its effort to temporalize general equilibrium analysis, and with the steady-state models of growth current in the fifties and sixties, he first laid out a very bold *Theory of Economic History*, centred around the emergence of the merchant as agent of intermediation in pre-modern markets, a work that remains

<sup>122</sup> *Econometrica*, April 1937, pp. 147–59; now in *Money, Interest and Wages*, Oxford 1982, pp. 100–15.

<sup>123</sup> See 'The Formation of an Economist', in *Classics and Moderns*, Oxford 1983, p. 361.

<sup>124</sup> *The Crisis in Keynesian Economics*, Oxford 1974, p. 85.

the foremost attempt by an outstanding economic thinker since Marx to marry history and theory in a single framework. In another original move, he then published a 'neo-Austrian' account of *Capital and Time*. Viennese economics had always been distinguished from Walrasian by its insistence of the importance of time—whether as differential periods of production in capital theory, or unpredictable discovery processes in price theory. Hicks radicalized this legacy with a flow-analysis of inputs to fixed, as well as circulating, capital. The most important result of his construction was to generate the novel concept of a 'traverse': those phases, nearly always of disequilibrium, in which one growth path shifts, under the impulse of some key invention, towards another. Hicks subsequently came to feel that even this theorization was too static, in so far as the point of departure for a traverse was still formally—but implausibly—assumed to be a steady state of prior growth.<sup>25</sup> No thinker in the neoclassical tradition has made such a strong and sustained effort to integrate time as a positive principle of explanation into economics.

### General Equilibrium Theory

By the early eighties the radical Right had come to power, and the Thatcher government was pursuing a course avowedly inspired by monetarist doctrines. At the depth of the recession, the budget of 1981 imposed the tightest fiscal squeeze since the war. Reaction among British economists showed that a decade after the end of the boom, the dominant outlook in the discipline had not substantially altered. A public letter strongly attacking the regime's policy was signed by some 360 economists, including virtually the whole faculty at Cambridge, forcing the Treasury to a rare official reply. Co-organizer of this protest was Frank Hahn, not entirely by accident Britain's most prominent general equilibrium theorist. Historically, there has on the whole been a curious inverted symmetry between the intellectual and political traits of the respective traditions descending from Walras and Menger. Austrian economics was distinguished from the start by its realist emphasis: averse to mathematical formalization, it stressed uneven time, imperfect knowledge and cyclical imbalance—themes very close to features of the Marxist tradition. At the same time, after the generation of Böhm-Bawerk and Wieser, it became the most militantly conservative school in modern economics—consistently the far right of the field. The power of the Austrian labour movement and the strength of Austro-Marxism, compared with their political and intellectual counterparts in France or England, no doubt explain this turn after World War I. Out of this hostile intimacy came the only really searching and informed line of critique of the Marxist programme in neoclassical literature, from Böhm-Bawerk through Mises to Hayek.

By contrast, the general equilibrium tradition, resting on idealized assumptions of perfect competition and complete foresight (the *Allwissenheit* Menger had vehemently criticized), was resolutely abstract and ahistorical; and as such was often perceived by critics as

<sup>25</sup> *Economic Perspectives*, Oxford 1977, p. 195.

little more than a metaphysical sublimation of the invisible hand into the higher mathematics. Yet paradoxically this extreme formalism was to be persistently associated with progressive political sympathies. Walras himself, an admirer of Proudhon, claimed that his system for the first time brought science to socialism. If Pareto was a ferocious opponent of the labour movement, his pupil Barone was *malgré lui* the first to demonstrate the formal coherence of imperative planning. Between the wars, Lange founded his model of market socialism—in reply to the Austrian attack on the possibility of Marxist economic calculation—on the Walrasian theory of *tâtonnement*, while Lerner used Paretian ordinal utility to show that an optimal distribution of income would be fully egalitarian. Arrow's original ambition was to develop economic planning, and his eventual consummation of GET was always combined with work bearing on social justice. Persistent Austrian suspicion of the general equilibrium outlook was thus not unfounded. The affinity between an absolute theoretical formalism and relative political radicalism may have derived, in various ways, from what might be called the subversive potential of perfectionism: on the one hand, the postulate of perfect competition could well lead to reflection on the gap between ideal and reality, with critical consequences for actual market processes; on the other, the assumption of perfect knowledge might on the same grounds prompt an interest in central planning, as a more logical embodiment of it than decentralized markets.

At all events, the public sympathies of the two leading practitioners of GET in the UK have not been unusual in this tradition. Their work has differed widely in other respects. Hahn, co-author with Arrow of a massive *General Competitive Analysis* (1971), had won his reputation making good the omission of money from the Walrasian framework. He was therefore well situated to meet the claims of Friedman and Lucas head-on, as he did in *Money and Inflation* (1982) and in a savage subsequent address in the USA, which concluded: 'Macroeconomics today is in the state in which astronomy would be if Ptolemaic theory once again came to dominate the field. There can in fact be few instances in other disciplines of such a determined turning back of the clock. A great deal of what is written today as well as the policy recommendations which have been made would be thoroughly at home in the twenties.'<sup>16</sup> Upholding Keynes's grasp of the realities of involuntary unemployment, while conceding Austrian insistence on the importance of dispersed information and decision, Hahn has indicated some sympathy for Lange-Lerner conceptions of market socialism, with incentives for innovation perhaps held at Swedish levels of inequality. At the same time, while acknowledging certain limitations of general equilibrium theory—its exclusion of unequal market power, interdependent agency, public goods, missing markets—he has vigorously defended it from charges of complacency or irrelevance.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Equilibrium and Macroeconomics*, Oxford 1984, pp. 325.

<sup>17</sup> 'On Market Economics', in Skidelsky, ed., *Thatcherism*, pp. 107–24; 'General Equilibrium Theory', *Equilibrium and Macroeconomics*, pp. 72–87.

By contrast, Michio Morishima, himself a formidable technician whose early work was concerned to develop a dynamic version of GET, under the influence of Von Neumann's growth analysis, became in the same years a scathing critic of the sterility of highly mathematized equilibrium models—of that 'wretched state of affairs' in which 'so deep and extensive has been the mathematization of economics since 1940 that it has lost all sense of balance, becoming divorced from the knowledge of economic systems and economic history.'<sup>18</sup> Morishima is the most striking example to date of the paradoxical genetics of the Lausanne tradition, since he is the author of profoundly admiring, scholarly studies of both Marx and Walras, and can be regarded equally as a Marxist or Walrasian. His own most distinctive work, however, moves away from the realm of reproduction schemes or equilibrium conditions towards a comparative economics grounded in sociology and history. *The Economics of Industrial Society* (1984) aims to 'analyse the price mechanism in accordance with reality' with a tableau of different types of market, customarily conflated by GET, as they operate in different kinds of national economy, diversified by size and self-sufficiency as well as by property regimes—drawing contrasts both within the capitalist and communist worlds, and between them. Morishima's explanation of his own society's spectacular postwar record, *Why Has Japan 'Succeeded'?*, sets it in a historical *longue durée* centrally affected by the peculiar forms of Confucian and Taoist ideology in Japan, and their impact on state and social relationships: providing a largely Weberian framework for an essentially Marxist account of Japanese capitalism. Whatever the friction between these, the outcome of such concrete enquiries compares favourably with the fruits of the 'capital controversy', the principal focus of most economic theory on the Left inspired by Sraffa in the sixties, which in retrospect left its neoclassical target substantially unscathed.

### Inequality and Welfare Economics

Meanwhile, in another noticeable feature of this period, there was revival of the distributional tradition that had marked an earlier phase of English economics. After Pigou, welfare theory underwent a relative eclipse during the Keynesian meridian. The major contributions to it came, if anything, from America—Bergson and Lerner to Arrow. But whatever the degree of radical impulse behind such work, its effect was generally stymied by the conservative dogma that ruled out all interpersonal comparisons of welfare as impermissible—leaving the subject with only the *caput mortuum* of Pareto-optimal 'efficiency'.<sup>19</sup> Paradigmatic of the consequences was the ironic

<sup>18</sup> 'The Good and Bad Uses of Mathematics', in Peter Wiles and Guy Routh, eds., *Economics in Distarray*, Oxford 1984, pp. 69–70. Morishima compares Arrow and Hahn's *General Competitive Analysis* with Spinoza's *Ethics* as an example of virtually metaphysical axiomatization divorced from empirical observation.

<sup>19</sup> That is, any distribution in which one person's welfare cannot be improved without worsening that of another; or in Routh's words, 'a Pareto-optimum is said to obtain when nothing more can be given to the hungry, the cold, the ragged and the homeless without incommoding the glutton, the miser, the usurer and the playboy.' *Economics in Distarray*, p. 313.

achievement of Arrow himself, personally moved by the classic concerns of a strong social conscience, yet intellectually most celebrated for a theorem demonstrating the impossibility of aggregating individual choices into collectively agreed outcomes—in effect, any welfare politics at all.<sup>120</sup> Against this background James Meade's *Principles of Political Economy* represented a return, in theme as well as title, to the preoccupations of Mill and Sidgwick. Once a member of Keynes's circle, Meade's special field after the war was international trade, and his *Principles* opens by remarking that the vast disparities in wealth between nations must be for the contemporary economist the equivalent of mass unemployment before the war. But the range of its four volumes actually lies elsewhere: between a stylized taxonomy of different possible combinations of property and earning power, a survey of problems of equilibrium or growth, and a critical discussion of key theoretical issues in planning and distribution.<sup>121</sup> Its upshot is a study of *The Just Economy* that proceeds from a carefully argued statement of the validity of interpersonal welfare comparisons to a systematic exploration of the contexts and criteria for social redistribution. Meade's own commitments have been to radical use of taxation in a market economy to achieve egalitarian outcomes.<sup>122</sup> In the early eighties he designed much of the fiscal programme for the fledgling SDP; his own thinking, however, has on occasion been to the left of the party he advised. While Meade's work has been mainly conceptual, A.B. Atkinson's *Economics of Inequality* is more directly empirical—emphasizing the importance, against convenient scepticism, of bringing quantification in the Kuznets tradition to the distribution of wealth and income, and the need for major social insurance transfers to eliminate poverty. Atkinson's very thorough survey concludes with the observation that it is an 'indictment of economics' today that 'far too little is known about this central subject.'<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup> 'My work in economics took its original cast from the depression, during which I grew to maturity... My ideal in those days was the development of economic planning.' After the war, Arrow became involved in problems of social choice, while working on applications of games theory to international relations for the RAND Corporation—his original example being a set of three actors choosing between cold war, hot war and disarmament. But his own interest in them was always very different: 'Perhaps the deepest motivation for study of the theory of social choice, at least for the economist, is the hope of saying something useful about the evaluation of income distribution.' *Social Choice and Justice*, Oxford 1984, pp. vii, 3–5, 87.

<sup>121</sup> The pursuit of these themes is not wholly consistent. The second volume, *The Growing Economy*, London 1968, sketches a gamut of institutional models characterized respectively by equal earnings and equal property ownership; absolute division between (poorly) waged work and property owning; a mixture in which some wage earners own property and some property owners earn incomes; a variant where taxes and subsidies largely equalize unequal incomes; complete ownership of all property by the state; regulation of incomes by manipulation of factor prices—dubbed Propdem, Planncap, Proppcap, Welstat, Plansoc and Tradcom (i.e. property-owning democracy, plantation capitalism, property-owning capitalism, welfare state, planned socialism, trade-union community); pp. 44–48. Its sequels, *The Controlled Economy* (1971) and *The Just Economy* (1976), although their topics are planning and social equity, do not however exploit the typology.

<sup>122</sup> See, in particular, *The Intelligent Radical's Guide to Economic Policy*, London 1975. Meade seems to have been a significant influence on Rawls.

<sup>123</sup> *The Economics of Inequality*, London 1983, pp. 280–81, 285.

The most fundamental contribution to its rethinking as a general social issue has come from Amartya Sen, whose writing more than that of any other member of his generation has renewed the classical connexion of philosophy and economics. Multifarious in its interests, extending from acute critiques of conventional accounts of consumer preference, rational choice, and the profit motive, to calm defences of the possibilities of planning and the values of development theory, Sen's work has been unified by a central concern with poverty and inequality. Whether demystifying the causes of famine in Bengal, brought on not by natural calamities crippling supply but the social miseries of 'ineffective' demand, or remeasuring poverty in the United States by ranks of relative deprivation, its direction has been unfailingly radical. In broad position, Sen too has sought to recover the normative ground of interpersonal comparison, but to free it from the burden of the utilitarian framework earlier associated with it—whose bias for maximization of the sum of welfare, he argues, renders it inept for determining its distribution, indeed logically inequalitarian. Rawls's alternative, to which Sen is otherwise closer, is also faulted for its insensitivity to the diversity of individual needs. Instead of 'primary goods', however generously defined, the measure of real justice would be an equalization of primary powers—that is, a basic set of positive freedoms, as so many *capabilities* whose general diffusion would require differentiation of resources according to needs.<sup>24</sup> The echoes of Marx are unmistakable. In his most recent work, *The Standard of Living* and *On Ethics and Economics* (1987), Sen has developed this case: criticizing 'welfarism' for ignoring the values of agency as distinct from well-being, and reducing well-being to utilities; but also noting that theories based on rights cannot escape consequentialist judgements, even if these differ in kind from the utilitarian calculus. In the most direct convergence of economic and philosophic cultures in this period, Sen has collaborated with Bernard Williams in a collection devoted to moving *Beyond Utilitarianism*. Yet in a comparative perspective the revival of welfare economics in Britain plainly owes much to the strength of an enlightened utilitarian tradition; it is far less surprising than Sen avers that opponents of economic equality should have so frequently blamed utilitarian thinking for promoting it.

### Limits to Growth

On the other hand, perhaps the most elegant and original contribution to welfare economics of all in these years was one that reversed the dominant problematic of the field in Britain. Fred Hirsch's *Social Limits to Growth* (1977) pursued the consequences of prosperity rather than poverty, in an ingenious analysis of the false promises of development: the increasing importance, yet insurmountable scarcity, of positional goods—the best land, jobs, art—whose value depends precisely on the impossibility of their general possession, in circumstances where the conditions of consumption at large become at the same time ever more social. Here the interpersonal comparisons cautiously readmitted by Meade or Sen as a normative move actually

<sup>24</sup> *Reasons, Values and Development*, Oxford 1984, p. 323.

become the positive motor of social dynamic, whose inevitable frustration breeds the paradoxical discontents of rising mass incomes. Perhaps the best tribute to this work came from Hahn, who found it, from the standpoint of general equilibrium, theory on 'too grand and ominous' a scale.<sup>25</sup> In these different ways, the most distinctive strands within British economics moved apart from dominant American trends, and against the grain of domestic politics. At the levers of the state, monetarist counsels were applied for a time in the early eighties;<sup>26</sup> and in the ideology of the regime, Austrian doctrines formed a significant intellectual background. But Walters soon returned to America, and Hayek remained offstage. The principal, perhaps the only, theoretical sector where real gains were made by the Right was development economics. There what had once been the heterodoxy of Bauer—all-out liberalization—bid fair to become a new consensus, as disillusionment with the experience of dirigiste nationalism in the Third World converted many a previous interventionist. On the other hand, in the final years of bureaucratic stagnation throughout most of the Second World, the liveliest discussion of the possible shapes of a post-command socialism also occurred in Britain, led by Alec Nove's invigorating *Economics of Feasible Socialism*. But the spread effect of these trends at the edge of the field remained limited. Within the discipline as a whole, the ongoing changes in the First World received little sustained or substantive analysis. The advent of global recession and the reaction of the Anglo-Saxon regimes to it, cast, in effect, an unflattering light on the performance of mainstream economics at large, of centre, left or right. Few major structural explanations of the world crisis or its outcomes were forthcoming from any quarter. Freely admitted in the centre,<sup>27</sup> it was not to be remedied on the left by even the best tracking of the local vicissitudes of British capitalism, exemplified by Cambridge Applied Economics. Nothing comparable to French regulation theory, whatever its own shortcomings, emerged in these years. Nor, for that matter, did the prescriptive programmes for recovery of the Right fare much better. Reagan and Thatcher were triumphantly re-elected, on programmes of conservative economic rectitude. The American regime engineered euphoria with massive deficit spending, the British with rapid credit expansion. If the means were opposite—sound money and fiscal laxity in the US, tight budgets and easy money in the UK—the outcome was the same. The counter-revolution against Keynes proved in each case to be bluff.

<sup>25</sup> 'Reflections on the Invisible Hand', in *Equilibrium and Macroeconomics*, pp. 119–20. Sen's famous text, 'The Profit Motive', contains his homage to Hirsch; *Resources, Values and Development*, pp. 90–110.

<sup>26</sup> For an account from within, see Alan Walters, *Britain's Economic Renaissance*, New York 1986. Walters himself was a sceptic about rational-expectations theory, inclining instead to Fellner's 'credibility' approach—that business confidence in the self-discipline of government is the key to lowering inflation and unemployment; pp. 10, 26–31.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Hicks, *The Crisis in Keynesian Economics*, p. 3; or Arrow's candid avowal in introducing a volume on vanguard topics in the profession: 'Both at the symposium and among economists in general, there was a tendency to shy away from the grandest themes. The fundamental questions of economic change, the theme of Schumpeter's work, are not discussed. It was suggested that economists displayed strong risk aversion in their own choice of research topics.' K. Arrow and S. Honkapohja, eds., *Frontiers of Economics*, Oxford 1983, p. 19.



## 7. History

A common feature of the intellectual changes so far noted is their turn away from an abstracted present or dissociated psyche, towards the complexities of history. But what have been the principal developments within the practice of history itself? The most articulate interpretation of the trend-lines here sees the main changes as moving in virtually the opposite direction—that is, schematically, from left to right. Lawrence Stone, in probably the most influential version of this reading, has argued that it was the late sixties which saw the zenith of the kind of radical history, informed by and attached to the ideals of the social sciences—structural explanation of the broadest human processes, to which he himself is committed. By contrast, the ensuing twenty years witnessed a progressive retreat and erosion of this model of historiography: the reassertion of the particular and the piecemeal, the contingent and the episodic; outlooks exemplified in a growing reversion to traditional narrative that 'marks the end of an era: the end of the attempt to produce a coherent and scientific explanation of change in the past.'<sup>28</sup> Roughly speaking, in other words, just as sociology finally discovered the macro-historical, history itself was going increasingly micro-archival. For Stone, this change of climate was an international phenomenon, affecting France or America as much as England. Its more specifically British variant has recently been sketched, with yet greater acerbity, by David Cannadine. In this account, the golden age of scholarly enquiry into the British past, starting in the late forties, reached its climacteric in the early seventies: a period in which the professional expansion of the discipline, intellectual renovation of its methods, and political resonance of its findings—not just for England, but for the world at large—all marched together. Since then, the bottom has dropped out of this combination. The teaching of history has contracted, its subject matter has dwindled into dispersal and obscurity. In these brusquely altered circumstances, of fewer practitioners and narrower horizons, 'British historians today are mainly concerned to show that less happened, less dramatically, than was once thought.' After successive revisions effacing the significance of the Tudor reforms, the importance of the Civil War, the reality of the Industrial Revolution, 'it is continuity, rather than change, which now prevails in British history, humdrum happenings rather than high drama. Indeed, the two most recent syntheses—one from Oxford, the other from Cambridge—leave almost no major landmarks or themes in our recent history at all.'<sup>29</sup> Across the new, featureless terrain wander assorted ideologies of a resurgent Right: Cabinetary solipsism, Thatcheromorphic individualism, Jacobite obscurantism. 'British history as thus described has all the hallmarks of a declining industry.'

How far are such verdicts an accurate depiction of the field in Britain since the late sixties? In considering them, it is necessary to bear in mind that the history produced in Britain, and the history produced of Britain, are two distinct matters—the latter being only one

---

<sup>28</sup> *The Past and the Present*, London 1981, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> 'British History: Past, Present—and Future?', *Past and Present*, No. 116, August 1987, p. 183.

category, albeit that enjoying far the greatest public visibility, within the former. Viewed from a comparative perspective, one of the most remarkable—if least remarked on—aspects of the historiographic scene in this period is the geographical scope of the output of so many British historians, as a collective achievement. One might say that no country in the world has contributed so much to the history of others as this one. The fact is most obvious in the case of the major European countries. Central to the historical literature on their national past have, again and again, been works by historians from the United Kingdom. The most selective list suffices to make the point. The writing of Elliott, Lynch or Carr on modern Spain; Cobb or Zeldin on France; Mack Smith or Seton-Watson on Italy; Carsten, Taylor, Blackbourn and Eley, James on Germany; Roberts on Sweden; Schama or Israel on the Netherlands; Madariaga, Seton-Watson, Carr on Russia; Boxer on Portugal—constitute unavoidable references, often indeed veritable magnets of controversy, in the historiography of the societies concerned. The density of this presence can be measured against the paucity of reciprocal explorations of the British past from the Continent over the same span of time, compared with the days of Halévy or Vinogradoff, not to speak of Ranke or Guizot; as also of the limited number of major cross-national bodies of work within the Continent itself. British historians, partly perhaps because of a residual imperial perch, possibly too because of greater institutional shelter, have been more outward-looking since the postwar settlement. Beyond the confines of Europe itself, this is a discipline which has also produced—or permitted—the monumental enterprise of Needham on China; a first collective scholarly history of Latin America; the principal reworking of the pre-literate history of the Old World, in the work of Renfrew; and—the most impressive general achievement—the richest contemporary historiography of Classical Antiquity, with a striking range of theoretical outlooks and moral tones, from Syme to Finley, Ste Croix to Brown, Hopkins to Brunt, Lane-Fox to Herrin. It would be impossible to tax this side of the discipline—what might be called its ramified ‘international’ dimension—with lack of large themes or bold explanations, withdrawal to the parochial or accidental, easy drift in the rivulets of time.

On the other hand, the historiography of the English past itself has followed a largely separate course, and one which—because of the traditional centrality of this kind of writing to public life in Britain—has possessed much greater salience in the general culture at large. Here rival versions of national self-understanding have always competed in close proximity to current political conflicts, essentially determining the ideological centre of gravity of the field as a whole. The quantitative concentration of scholars in the domestic sector anyway ensures the hegemony of its impact over that of the more scattered and arcane ‘foreign’ sectors. In this area, the Left had made its principal postwar advances. Institutionally, the most significant vehicle of its progress was *Past and Present*, founded in 1952 by the nucleus of the Communist Party Historians’ Group, and broadened editorially in 1958 to include a levy of non-Marxist historians, led by Stone, which in time became

the liveliest historical journal in the country.<sup>130</sup> The strength of this formation lay in the alliance of socialist and radical-liberal forces it represented, and the accumulating output of the generation of historians on either wing. The first half of the sixties saw the appearance of *The Age of Revolution* (1962), *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* (1965), as well as the symposium *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660* which marked the publishing 'arrival' of *Past and Present* itself. But the wider influence of this kind of history came later—probably reaching its peak in the mid seventies, between the time of *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), *Whigs and Hunters*, *The Age of Capital* (1975), and *The Brenner Debate* (1976 onwards). By this time, something approaching a continuous (if by no means homogenous) series of interpretations of English society and politics, stretching from the mediaeval to the industrial epochs, could be constructed from this collective work and its antecedents: a variegated critical descent moving through, among others, Hilton on the Middle Ages, Tawney and Stone on the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Hill and Manning on the seventeenth century, Thompson on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Hobsbawm and Kiernan on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was never a dominant current, as the most casual glance at the standard survey of developments in the field—Elton's *Modern Historians on British History*—invariably made clear. But its presence plainly marked a break from the time when the discipline mainly divided between Namier and Butterfield. A shift in the balance of viewpoints on the British past had occurred.

#### Faction and Accident

It was this change which in due course came under strong counter-attack from the Right. Ever since Hume and Macaulay, national history has consistently been the most politically charged branch of higher learning in England. Hence it was always likely that a radical turn to the right in the political sphere would find some corresponding movements in the historical profession. But just as the historiographic 'Left' was itself an amalgam of Marxist socialists and—often semi-Weberian—liberals, sharing certain convictions about the methods and tasks of historical explanation, so the new revisionary 'Right' was a mixture of militant Conservatives and well-wishers of the Alliance, united more by an interrelated set of intellectual *parti pris* about the discipline than by any close-knit political bonds. Yet there was one uncanny concordance between the ideology of Thatcherism and the rhetoric of revisionism. Just as the ostensible *bête noire* of the former was not just the Left, but a centre establishment allegedly in continuity or collusion with it, so the polemical targets of the latter regularly included not only Marxist historians—obviously the prime enemies—but also 'Whig' eminences of centrist persuasion, taxed with lending involuntary aid and comfort to them. In scope, the range of offensives launched under this aegis strikingly matched that of the

<sup>130</sup> For the emergence of the journal, see the attractive account by Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton and Eric Hobsbawm of its 'Origins and Early Years' in *Past and Present*, No. 100, pp. 1-14.

emplacements acquired by the Left, period by period. Alan Macfarlane sought to demolish Rodney Hilton's account of the agrarian society of the Middle Ages, but also that of Michael Postan. Geoffrey Elton attacked not only Stone's view of the late Tudor order but Neale's interpretation of the role of Elizabethan parliaments. For the Civil War revisionists Conrad Russell and Paul Christiansen, Christopher Hill and Lawrence Stone are joined in the dock by J.H. Hexter. Rewriting the Hanoverian epoch, Jonathan Clark casts Edward Thompson and Sir John Plumb—famously opposed watchers of Walpole—into a common obloquy. Disputing an Industrial Revolution and disposing of imperialism, the American Donald McCloskey would sweep the board of Hobsbawm and Hobson alike. The pattern of rejections and dismissals is a consistent one.

What have been the driving forces behind this historiographic backlash? Two central objects of animadversion stand out. The first is any explanation of major historical processes in terms of class; the second is any discernment in them of intelligible progress. These options are, of course, quite separable, as Butterfield, the original critic of *The Whig Interpretation of History*, realized.<sup>32</sup> But their amalgamation into a single 'Whig-Marxist' spectre has been one of the most insistent phobias of current revisionism. Common to them, in the eyes of this opposition, is the notion that large changes are likely to have large causes—revealing some long-term structural logic, of whatever kind. Against this prejudice, the new historical Right characteristically asserts the pre-eminent role of chance: the unpredictable and improbable consequences of small causes and slight accidents, for the course of even the most momentous events. A general aleatorism of this kind can, however, provide at most an epistemological background to specific investigations, in which the elements of contingency at work in any given historical situation remain to be identified. Here a variety of candidates come into play, according to the temperament and outlook of the historians concerned. If social class is the causal agency uniformly abhorred, at least four different substitutes for it can be distinguished as bearers of alternative, contingent explanation.

The first of these is political faction. Conceived as more or less adventitious and unstable networks of personal ambition, so many cabals or clientages devoid of larger public meaning or anchorage in wider social forces, factional groupings become the key to understanding the downfall of the Stuart monarchy in the mid-seventeenth century—the hazard of their collision occasioning the 'traffic-accident' of the Civil War, in the vision of Russell, Fletcher or Sharpe.<sup>33</sup> Over two centuries later, the same explanatory schema is applied to late Victorian parliamentary democracy, and even its metamorphosis after World War I. For Cooke and Vincent, examination of the crises following the Third Reform Bill of 1884 reveals the lesson that this

<sup>32</sup> He was quite sympathetic to Marxist approaches to history at the time he wrote *The Whig Interpretation*; see 'History and the Marxian Method', *Seriatism*, Vol. I, No. 4, March 1933, pp. 339–55.

<sup>33</sup> The formula was originally Laslett's, before being taken up by Russell.

was a 'system where high politics is an arcane and esoteric craft whose meaning is not even intelligible to many members of the cabinet, a closed world 'whose primary interest was inevitably its own very private institutional life.'<sup>33</sup> The subsequent entry of the Labour Party into this order paradoxically becomes the occasion, in Maurice Cowling's work, for the most indomitable statement of a methodological principle stretchable back to Jacobean times, with only the slightest of adjustments to modernity: 'The context in which high politics was played was the context in which politicians reacted to one another. The political system consisted of fifty or sixty politicians in conscious tension with one another whose accepted authority constituted political leadership... High politics was primarily a matter of rhetoric and manoeuvre... Antipathy, self-interest and mutual contempt were the strongest levers of action, the most powerful motives in conflict.'<sup>34</sup> Here the formal circularity of this style of explanation is expressly projected as a substantive trait of the system to be explained: 'a network of plebiscitary demagogues whose chief purpose was to jostle each other as they picked their way' through it.

The elevation of faction as a self-sufficient motor of events necessarily focuses on political life. It is the accidentalist view from above. An alternative strategy sets out to undo standard socio-economic accounts of the past. In this variant, the operative principle, whose reality dispels the fictions of class, is the household. Demographic and anthropological in background, it is no less committed to the primacy of chance, from below. In the words of Peter Laslett, reverent excavator of family life in *The World We Have Lost*, 'there is no point in denying the contingency even of epoch-making historical occurrences.'<sup>35</sup> On the face of it, social structures would seem less promising material than statecraft for throws of the dice. Macfarlane's *Origins of English Individualism* resolves the difficulty by not so much denying efficient causes as displacing them so far back into the mists of time as to render them inscrutable. The goal of the book is to demolish the belief that there was any 'great transformation' in the nature of English agrarian society in the early modern epoch—so much as the vestige of a transition from feudalism to capitalism. Macfarlane aims to show that there had never been any custom-bound peasantry in England at all, but rather that a mobile, profit-oriented population of nuclear households, rampantly individualist in practice and outlook, had existed from the depth of the Middle Ages. Alone in Europe, 'England was as "capitalist" in 1250 as it was in 1550 or 1750.'<sup>37</sup> Whence it derived this privilege, from what earlier stroke of fortune, is not disclosed; but Macfarlane hints that the origins of our 'beautiful system' of native property and liberty are hidden in the darkness of Teutonic woods, in the age of Tacitus.

<sup>33</sup> *The Governing Passion—Cabinet Government and Party Politics 1885–1886*, Brighton 1974, pp. 22, 161.

<sup>34</sup> *The Impact of Labour*, Cambridge 1971, pp. 3–4, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> *The World We Have Lost*, London 1983, pp. 198–199, 334.

<sup>37</sup> *The Origins of English Individualism*, Oxford 1978, p. 195.

## The Idiosyncratic Individual

The anthropological dissolution of cause and class terminates in familiar acquisitive households. The logical step beyond it is taken by a third current, in which history becomes programmatically anecdotal, and the statistically computed household gives way to the idiosyncratic individual proper. The two masters of this genre are both historians not of England but of France, Richard Cobb and Theodore Zeldin. Their public renown, probably unmatched by any other practitioners in the 'foreign' sector, owes something to the special position of France within the British imagination—the one European country to figure as the intimately alien, alluring other of the national soul. As such, exploration of 'the French' in this historiographic mode moves on particularly congenial terrain: a scholarship of emotions or of eccentrics appealing to the most traditional kinds of curiosity about our Latin neighbour. Cobb, the more flamboyant of the pair, chronicler of suicides and derelicts, footpads and *filles de joie*, not to speak of his own picaresque self, flaunts a vehement general aversion to ideas, statistics, explanations, theories of any kind—an anarchism of the mind, more than of politics. Originally—in French—a historian of the French Revolution, his subsequent reputation—in English—was won with vignettes designed to show its 'irrelevance', and that of all great collective events, by exploring 'the myriad variations of individual lives' and their correlate, 'the apartness and integrity of the individual'.<sup>38</sup> Zeldin, more relaxed and expansive in temperament, by contrast freely systematizes rejection of all system, in the most explicit manifesto of any of the new waves, calling for complete emancipation of the profession from the tyrannies of 'class, causation and time'.<sup>39</sup> He theorizes the capacious procedures of an alternative miscellany in the name of a yet more radical nominalism—not so much a monadology of isolate integrity, as something closer to a post-structuralism of friable identity. 'The traditional categorization of humans into nations, classes, groups and movements is necessarily woolly. Individuals are the basic atoms in all these categories, and a more precise view of them emerges if they are looked at under the microscope.' Such 'individuals, like atoms, are made up of masses of particles struggling inside them', with a 'multiplicity of impulses and needs' and 'random behaviour'.<sup>40</sup> The principal conclusion of the thousand pages of *France 1848–1945* devoted to Ambition, Love, Politics, Intellect, Anxiety and Taste as 'six different approaches to life' across the Channel is that, lacking emotional stability or self-knowledge, 'the individual has not learnt to cope with himself'<sup>41</sup>—a pathos far from the competent rational calculators discovered in earlier English individualism.

<sup>38</sup> *Tour de France*, London 1976, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> 'Social History and Total History', *Journal of Social History*, Winter 1976, pp. 242–43.

<sup>40</sup> *The French*, London 1983, p. 530; a work where Zeldin's tolerance of communists and *seicento-bourgeois* is otherwise in pointed contrast with Cobb's spleen towards them. Compare, for example, *French and Germans*, *Germans and French*, London 1983, pp. 120–22, 138–39, 176.

<sup>41</sup> *France 1848–1945*, Vol. II, Oxford 1977, pp. 169–70.

## Historical Idealism and the History of Ideas

The final significant substitution of this period occurred in the history of ideas. These have always constituted a peculiar zone of tension for conservative thought. For on the one hand, the autonomy and efficacy of ideas need to be asserted against any mere materialist reduction of them to social interests. On the other hand, their power and value must not be overestimated, in rationalist delusions ignoring the superior forces of traditional custom and perennial human nature that humble the claims of all doctrines. In the postwar English historical scene, Namier gave brutally eloquent expression to the second reflex, provoking Butterfield to reaffirm the first. The occasion of the dispute was the place—or pretence—of principle in politics in the reign of George III. It is no accident that the most articulate and self-aware polemicist among the younger revisionists of the Right, J.C.D. Clark, should have embodied the polarity, in his redrawing of *English Society 1688–1832*, with outstanding clarity. Declaring himself an adherent of Butterfield against Namier, Clark's central theme is the vital importance of Anglican theology to the political *modus operandi* of the Ancien Régime—a primacy that lasted from the Restoration down to its dissolution in the Reform crisis, triggered not by popular pressure for suffrage but by the breakdown of barriers to heresy, with the admission of Dissenters and Catholics to the political order. The extravagance of this substantive case is matched by the heuristic credo that accompanies it—a self-declared 'idealist methodology, pushed to its conclusion', for which social perception defines social being, to the point where class is no more than a construct of a malcontent intelligentsia, and it may be doubted whether the economy itself 'has any existence outside contemporaries' perceptions'.<sup>142</sup>

It would seem difficult to go further in proclaiming the supremacy of ideas. Yet Clark, in the same breath, rehearses a standard Namierite demotion of them: 'a proper study of the intricacy and uncertainty of human affairs is indeed too apt to reveal values as subservient to situations, and political and ethical norms as defined retrospectively, in response to events whose outcome is often unforeseen or undesired'.<sup>143</sup> In this version it is the carnal machinery of high politics that governs the course of events: spiritual peripeteia are no more than its after-effects. The same oscillation is traceable, again and again, in the judgements of the committed Right. Elton, often regarded as Namier's true successor, pioneered the deflationary attack on 'Whig' interpretations of late Elizabethan and early Stuart parliaments as self-assertive forums of emergent constitutional principle, the nurseries of English liberty; leaving his successors to portray them as the squabbling-grounds of small-minded squires manipulated by court rivals. Yet few historians have also entertained a less sceptical view of the lofty religious purpose and moral vision of the Henrician regime. Cowling, saturnine analyst of the oligarchic self-absorption and political cupidity behind the facade of nascent British democracy,

<sup>142</sup> 'On Hitting the Buffers: the Historiography of England's Ancien Régime', *Past and Present*, No. 117, November 1987, p. 200.

<sup>143</sup> *Revolution and Rebellion*, Cambridge 1986, p. 18.

is simultaneously the straight-faced author of studies according more importance to Anglican religion as 'public doctrine' in modern English intellectual life than any other contemporary writer; volumes that are comprehensive salutes to the 'high sense of national duty and consciousness' of the 'practitioners of English High Thought', from the dimmest crannies of college piety to the most illustrious offices of state, and their vital role in forming the national mind.<sup>144</sup> Such divided humours—a pendular swing between derision and devotion, the impulse to debunk and the call to revere—are a regular mark of the split mentality of this kind of conservatism.

Beyond these vagaries, however, a much more formidable reconstruction of the history of ideas has been under way. Its two central figures, Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, are far from scholars of the Right. Nevertheless, the influence of their work can be said to have tended, up to a certain point, in a parallel direction. For it too construed a common Whig-Marxist syndrome as a prime obstacle to historical understanding, with much the same hostility to either correlation of ideas with class, or commensuration of them with progress. This was, however, only one of its starting points. The first was a strong reaction not so much against the sociological derivation of ideas, as their philosophical disembodiment into a timeless canon of 'political theory', treated in abstraction from any surrounding history. In other words, the procedures of Leo Strauss were the initial adversary. The subsequent danger—which in time loomed larger—was those of C.B. Macpherson, enforcing their own selective abstractions from text and context. This double rejection, of Platonism and Marxism, did not lead to the alternative of High Politics—towards which, despite occasional gestures to Namier, this tendency has remained very reserved. Its original commitment was to full historical contextualization of ideas, in the inherited conflicts and conjunctures of their epoch. In practice, however, this became increasingly the pursuit of specific intellectual oeuvres back into the more general political languages of their time, asserting the authority of what Pocock—borrowing from Kuhn—termed the collective 'paradigm' over the thought of the individual. Taken to its conclusion, the effect of this move is not so much to urge the primacy of ideas as an antidote to the specific claims of class, as to suggest the general separability of discourses from the ruck of the social.

In Skinner's *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, this drift is checked by the presence of the major political upheavals—struggles between Emperor and Communes in mediaeval Italy, outbreak of the Reformation in Germany, eruption of Religious Wars in France—which scan the intellectual narrative, even if its weight of detail falls overwhelmingly on the multifarious inner connexions or mutations of concepts rather than their outer circumstances. In Pocock's work, on the other hand, the Cambridge turn towards a new intellectual history yielded its most flamboyant fruits.<sup>145</sup> In a series of powerful readings,

<sup>144</sup> *Religion and Public Doctrine*, Vol. II, Cambridge 1985, p. xxiv.

<sup>145</sup> It is the importance of the common Cambridge background that warrants inclusion of this New Zealander, long resident in the USA, in a British survey.



of extraordinary strength and delicacy, the tradition of Italian civic humanism that produced Machiavelli is traced through successive metamorphoses: in seventeenth-century England, where the vocabulary of politics was dominated by the quite distinct idioms of common law and an immemorial constitution, ruptured by Harrington but annealed again by his successors; and then into the contrasting commercial worlds of eighteenth-century Britain, the setting of Hume, Smith and Gibbon, and the insurgent American republic of Jefferson and Madison pitted against it. The effect of this epic pedigree is twofold. On the one hand, the very scale of the discursive transmigration pursued across these distances of time and space suggests, against Marxist assumptions, the independence of political ideas from social contexts determined by relations of class. On the other, the actual language of politics given the spotlight—the doctrines of classical republicanism, with their overwhelming stress on the active citizen—serves to displace the more juridical traditions that were to issue into modern liberalism and its relatively passive conception of citizenry, to the margins of real development, against Whig illusions.<sup>46</sup> Locke is unceremoniously bundled into the wings, as a figure who was for long of little moment. But if Whig retrospections of the past elicit Pocock's mockery, the political culture of the Whig oligarchy itself, in its own time, arouses his admiration. Regret attaches to Macaulay principally for not having lived to write the history of his appropriate subject—the Georgian stabilization.

### Self-Contained Orders

There can be little doubt of the profound renovation of the history of early modern political thought wrought by Pocock's work. But for all its authority, there is a central equivocation at its core. What are the relations between lines of discourse and patterns of power, the languages and the practices of politics? The question stares out from the mournful fates of Machiavelli and Harrington, the two central heroes of this account, not to speak of those of the cult of the Ancient Constitution in the time of Buckingham, or the ideology of civic virtue under Newcastle. At the outset, Pocock promised his readers that 'we shall be constantly inquiring, to what elements of social experience the language under study can be shown to refer?' Any charge that 'we do not relate thought to social structure should be utterly untenable.'<sup>47</sup> But over time the emphasis changed. Fifteen years later, he was declaring that 'language is self-reflective and talks largely about itself', and dismissing any interest in its political effects from his purview—'we are historians of discourse, not of behaviour.' But this, Pocock insists, is no restriction, since the contemporaries of Machiavelli or Hobbes were 'without exception' themselves 'concerned not with their practical political consequences, but with the challenges they

<sup>46</sup> Although Pocock took care to append some concluding strophes on behalf of a later liberalism, hinting at the dangers of an overly active conception of politics, at the end of *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton 1975, pp. 551–52, they were too cursory to save him from the complaints of Hexter that he had 'slithered past the central problem' of the coexistent power of the negative conception of liberty, from the outset of his story.

<sup>47</sup> *Politics, Language and Time*, London 1972, p. 36.

present to the normal structures of discourse.<sup>148</sup> Here the social and the linguistic are radically dissociated, and ideological vocabularies become all but self-contained orders. Pocock's own practice never quite fulfils either programme: it contains too many local insights into the tensions between systems of ideas and structures of fact for the second, and exhibits too little general cogency about them for the first. The result is to make this immensely confident work in one central respect curiously evasive. For what it never directly confronts is the dramatic gap between the intellectual vitality of the successive discourses it plots, and their institutional inconsequence. Florentine humanism, Caroline antiquarianism, Country whiggery were all in differing ways ideological misfits, sets of values or illusions without substantial purchase on the ascendant realities of their time: Absolutism, Puritanism, Old Corruption. Even classical American republicanism, the one candidate for genuine political efficacy, had—as Pocock himself notes—a short life in front of it, before spawning an order built on much of what it most feared and detested. The upshot of the monumental chain of ideas linked across *The Machiavellian Moment* appears moderate to minimal. It is as if discourse, once emancipated from undue social reference, is also delivered of explanatory power.

Across a definite range, then, variegated forces of self-proclaimed historiographic revision—not a few relishing the label of reaction—have held the initiative in recent years. On the other hand the political Right, in the narrower sense, has overlapped rather than simply coincided with these intellectual shifts. Some of its most visible publicists, prize-fighters of the press like Norman Stone, for example, have in their professional output actually been closer in approach to the best structural historians of the Left. These, in turn, have continued to produce major work challenging or undercutting the themes of the new conservatism—it is enough to cite Keith Thomas for the seventeenth century, John Brewer for the eighteenth, E.A. Wrigley for the nineteenth. History has proved the most complex, in its intersecting divisions, of all the disciplines in contention in these years. Compared with the United States, where the breakthrough of a Left that was newer came later than in Britain and has suffered no comparable counterattack,<sup>149</sup> there can be no doubt of the conservative impetus of the past decade. On the other hand, viewing the period as a whole, while the significant tactical gains have been made by an intellectual Right, strategically the scattered battlefield looks less unevenly divided.

## 8. Feminism

Finally, all the fields surveyed here were affected by the spread of

<sup>148</sup> *Virtue, Commerce and History*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 29, 14. One wonders what Clarendon, penning his *Brief View and Survey of the Dangerous and Persuasive Errors in Church and State in Mr Hobbes's Book entitled Leviathan* (where, *inter alia* the purpose of Hobbes's theory of succession could be no other than 'to induce Cromwell to break all the laws of his country, and to perpetuate their slavery under his progeny'), would have made of this remarkable claim. Hobbes himself would have been equally dumbfounded—the portrait of presbyterian ministry in *Behemoth* is scarcely an illustration of the Pocock doctrine.

<sup>149</sup> To get a sense of this, see the remarkable special issue of the *Journal of American History* of December 1987 on the Constitution, most untouchable of national values.

feminism, in ways that any simple enumeration of eminences, still male, fails to capture. The nature and degree of the impact that the women's movement has had within particular disciplines has varied widely, of course; in many cases it is probably too early, even for those most directly concerned, to assess the extent of the changes under way. But certain general developments stand out. Historically, the first wave of feminism, which secured the suffrage, also forced ajar the universities, allowing women to enter academic life. The small number who negotiated this passage soon distinguished themselves in two generations of creative work: those born towards 1900, and those towards 1920. Their names compare impressively with those in other Western countries of the time: in literary studies, Helen Gardner or Q.D. Leavis; in anthropology, Audrey Richards or Mary Douglas; in history, Eileen Power, Lucy Sutherland or Joan Thirk; in economics, Joan Robinson; in philosophy, G.E.M. Anscombe or Mary Warnock; in sociology, Ruth Glass; in art history, Anita Brookner; in international relations, Susan Strange; in psychoanalysis outside the academy, Joan Rivière or Hannah Segal. Whatever their private views of sexual inequality, without doubt quite diverse, the professional achievement of women like these was characteristically independent of them. They won their positions as individuals, and the cast of their work was general, without specifically female signature.

The second wave of feminism, from the early seventies onwards, self-consciously altered this pattern. Conceiving women's liberation as a collective goal, its aim was typically to effect transformations of intellectual fields rather than simply to make contributions to them, and its organizational style was often a deliberate refusal of earlier kinds of personal accomplishment. The main part of its work took two directions, which usually followed in sequence. First, there was reclamation of the role of the second sex within the subject areas concerned, ending the silence which had so typically surrounded it. The title of one of the pioneering writings of this kind, Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History* (1973), conveys the sense of an entire movement across the disciplines. The reassertion of relevant identity, producing the new rubric of women's studies, was then followed by widening efforts to reconstruct the field of—as it were—men's studies: that is, to shift the general plan of the discipline into new parameters, rather than find a distinct space within the old.

In this dual process, moving unevenly across traditional landscapes, two disciplines have been to the fore. It is probably significant that these were the areas whose totalizing impulses had set them apart within English culture in the preceding period, laying the intellectual basis for particularly strong showings by the Left in them thereafter: literary criticism and anthropology. But there were independent reasons, too, of an obvious kind, why each should have offered favourable terrain for feminist advance. In England, literature had long been outstanding as a creative province of women, who in the nineteenth century made up the larger number of its great novelists; while quite apart from this national tradition, the most universal concern of literature was the imagination of relations between the sexes. Women were already central to the subject here as nowhere else. In

anthropology too, because kinship was classically the core concern of the field, the place of women could not be circumvented, even where little or no attention had been paid to their experience, while the cultural variability of their roles gave obvious purchase for critical reflection on contemporary arrangements. In English studies, the combination of traditional enrolment patterns and new radical energies has given women a special prominence in the discipline: five out of eight chairs at Cambridge, long the dominant department in the country, are now held by them. Here there exists an ambiguous continuum between feminine and feminist scholarship; with critics like Barbara Everett or Marilyn Butler at one end of the spectrum, Gillian Beer towards the middle, Mary Jacobus or Cora Kaplan at the other end.<sup>50</sup> In anthropology, where the presence of women had always been less, and the issues posed for them were starker, there was a sharper dividing-line—the new feminist scholarship of Marilyn Strathern, Caroline Humphrey or Shirley Ardener forming a body of writing with less contiguity in the local tradition.<sup>51</sup> The relative density of work that has marked these fields is suggested by the number of debates and overviews to which they have given rise—currently, for example, Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) and Henrietta Moore's *Feminism and Anthropology* (1988).

The comparable ferment in the formal disciplines of history and sociology has in one sense been more limited, no doubt because the topical breadth of these does not provide such concentrated points of attack. On the other hand, each field possessed a recent empirical tradition that allowed for a relatively natural extension to feminist research: in the one case, the social history that had been given such a powerful impetus by (above all) Edward Thompson, with its emphasis on the recovery of the experience of the neglected and oppressed; in the other, the social administration descending from Timmuss, with its interests in family and welfare. While women historians continued to make their mark in traditional fields—Olwen Hufton and Linda Colley, both eighteenth century specialists now in the USA, are major examples—women's history as such became a central focus in the development of *History Workshop*, whose concerns have reflected the expansion (also subversion) of the social into the sexual past yielded by an alliance between socialist and feminist historians. Barbara Taylor's exploration of nineteenth-century utopianism, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (1983), or Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's study in the construction of the middle class, *Family Fortunes* (1987), are representative of this inspiration. Within sociology, empirical LSE traditions have been taken into the study of suffragism by Olive Banks; housework and maternity by Ann Oakley;<sup>52</sup> while the more deliberately theoretical bent which came later, altering the local

<sup>50</sup> Compare, respectively: *Poets in Their Time*, London 1986; *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, Oxford 1981; *Arguing with the Past*, London 1989; *Reading Women*, New York 1987; *Sex Changes*, London 1986.

<sup>51</sup> See, *inter alia*, Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, London 1988; Caroline Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*, Cambridge 1983; Shirley Ardener, ed., *Defining Females*, Oxford 1978.

<sup>52</sup> *Faces of Feminism*, Oxford 1981, and *Becoming a Feminist*, Brighton 1986; *The Sociology of Housework*, London 1974, and *From Here to Maternity*, London 1981.

complexion of the discipline, has been reflected in the two outstanding syntheses on the condition of women in contemporary Britain, Michèle Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today* (1980), where feminism is critically associated with Marxism, and Sylvia Walby's *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), closer to the approach of the sociology of power.

### Theorizing Difference

Pervasive in the literary theory of feminism throughout this period, and increasing in its history, has been the influence of psychoanalysis —itself the other principal area where the impact of the women's movement has been most visible. In the past, Freud's ideas, with their strongly biological cast and asymmetrical force, had often been regarded as fundamentally inimical to hopes of sexual equality, and were shunned as such by feminists. It was Lacan's reworking of Freud into a theory of subjectivity that was essentially non-instinctual, in effect substituting a dialectics of language for the economics of the libido, that altered this. Psychic formation as a symbolic process might allow cultural transformation. In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), a famous reading which became one of the landmarks of the period, Juliet Mitchell reclaimed Freud through Lacan for the women's movement, of which she had been the earliest theorist in the mid sixties. Ever since, there has been lively controversy over the relationship between the two, from many different positions: Lacan taxed with a rigid sexual determinism but Freud absolved; Freud and Lacan indicted alike; Klein presented or rejected as antidote to Freud. The variety and vigour of these debates, by now probably greater than those over the relation of feminism to Marxism, has certainly owed much to the perception that, as Terry Lovell puts it, 'while psychoanalysis is every bit as male-centred as Marxism, because it theorizes sexual difference and sexed subjectivity, then feminist intervention here *must* make a difference.'<sup>53</sup> In the same sense, psychoanalytic themes or frames have widely informed feminist contributions to the burgeoning area of cultural studies, where the impress of the women's movement has been considerable in the analysis of film, television, romantic fiction, political imagery, outside established academic precincts.<sup>54</sup>

Contrasting with the favourable terrain of literature, anthropology or psychoanalysis, and the accessible of history or sociology, the fields of philosophy and economics have remained much more inhospitable to feminism. The reason is not hard to seek. Among the social disciplines, these have traditionally been characterized by the highest degree of formal abstraction, from carnal difference or empirical reference alike, and technical closure. There were few or no prior vantage points here. Feminist presence has thus been far thinner on the ground. Individually, however, it has not been less distinguished.

<sup>53</sup> Terry Lovell, ed., *British Feminist Theory*, Oxford 1990, p. 25; now the best general collection in the field, this contains a selection from the psychoanalytic debates.

<sup>54</sup> On the last of these topics, see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women—Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–1914*, London 1987, which derives, but also departs, from art history—where feminist writing, finely initiated by Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Old Mistresses*, has predictably been sparser than in literary studies.

One of the finest single pieces of argument to be produced by a British feminist in this period was Janet Radcliffe Richards's philosophical exploration of the moral logic of sexual injustice in *The Scriptural Feminist* (1980), a critique of current usages of reason, nature and freedom employed against, and within, the women's movement. Its intellectual background lay in a lucid liberalism. The commitment of the major feminist work of political theory, on the other hand, was socialist—Carole Pateman's vigorous attack on the whole contractualist tradition from Locke onwards, for its occlusion of the conjugal servitudes within successive conceptions of citizenship, in *The Sexual Contract* (1988). In economics, where the neoclassical tradition gave least foothold of all, feminism was never likely to generate simple supplementary doctrines of *maître économique*: here too interventions, still confined to the outskirts of the discipline, have tended to be strongly to the left. The economic geography of Doreen Massey is one example, beyond the disciplinary border. The most innovative attempt so far to overcome the theoretical deadlock of plan and market, Diane Elson's outline of what an economic order without structural inequalities of sex or class might look like,<sup>55</sup> is another.

Across the range of fields reviewed here, then, British feminism has left its trace—uneven in extent, but concurrent in effect. From retrieval of the particular experience of women, in imagining, allying, desiring, working, reproducing, electing, it has moved to probe or redefine the most general categories in which social existence has been understood: exchange as a principle of kinship, gender as prior to desire, class as common to sex, 'new times' as designator of capital, nature as index of value, contract as integral to citizenship, ownership as key to economic life.<sup>56</sup> It is always possible for revisions to overshoot the mark, and it is likely that this will befall some of the feminist bids under way, or to come. The significance of sexual inequality as a social fact varies across the range of human activities; and between the marginal analytic positions it was generally accorded in the past and the unlimited reconstructive force at times ascribed it in the present, there is room for gradation. Resolution of these issues, as of the terms in which they are to be thought—including the notion of patriarchy itself, still employed and still contested—will certainly come from international rather than national debates.

In these, British feminism has had its own profile. Compared with the United States, with which there has been most intellectual exchange, its overall presence in the academy remains noticeably weaker. There were fewer women of scholarly prominence in America than England before the second wave of feminism; since, more have acquired standing in the university in the USA than in the UK, making for a

<sup>55</sup> 'Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market?' *NLR* 172, November–December 1988.

<sup>56</sup> Compare, for example, Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, pp. 311–16; Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London 1986, pp. 56–64; Nicky Hart, 'Gender and the Rise and Fall of Class Politics', *NLR* 175, May–June 1989, pp. 45–47; Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, pp. 198–200; Radcliffe Richards, *The Scriptural Feminist*, pp. 57–62; Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, pp. 231–32; Elson, 'Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market?', pp. 26–28.

significantly greater collective influence.<sup>57</sup> Like the women's movement at large, however, the balance of outlook in this feminism has been probably less radical than its British counterpart. Partly because of the traditional strength of the labour movement, and perhaps partly, too, because of its lesser integration into the established academy—its circulation in extracurricular milieus of civil society, cross-cutting conventional intellectual boundaries—British feminism has on the whole been more consistently averse to capitalism. This has not meant any simple reinforcement for the culture or politics of socialism. At least as much feminist work has been directed against the traditional Left as against the replenished Right, and possibly more. In that sense, the culture of feminism has escaped ordinary alignment. Yet it has always acted as a radical pressure. Within the general intellectual movement of these years, it was something like a transverse current—moving, as it were, diagonally across the wider flow, both quickening and altering its course.

## 9. Conclusions

By and large, then, the political changes that came over the British intellectual scene in these years were accompanied by theoretical shifts of a related—indeed sometimes more pronounced—character, across a wide range of social disciplines. Where major sociology had once been missing, it became overarching. Anthropology and aesthetics, traditional exceptions to a purblind empiricism and insensible positivism, tilted away yet further from them. Philosophy and economics, pulled by transatlantic developments, also departed significantly from them, regaining earlier moral energies and some mutual contact. In most of these areas, historical time—once pervasively banished—re-entered reflection; material life took on new referential weight; sexual difference won lodgement. The character and combination of these alterations varied greatly, of course, within and between fields. One of the main lessons of the period is how many diversely productive ways of allying a sense of history with a respect for material reality there are. The variety that was once capitalized played its part in this transformation, as a specific line and spur to others. But the turn itself was broader and untidier than any set of doctrinal developments. In historiography itself, paradoxically, the potential for vitiated renditions of it was also displayed—temporality reduced to a stream of accident, materiality to the promptings of self-consideration. Yet even here there was a complication of conservative motifs, amidst the pressure of many active alternative conceptions of the past. The peculiar *Gestalt* of the postwar culture, in so many ways vacantly asocial or slackly psychologistic, had dissolved.

By the eighties, the net effect of these changes was a marked disjuncture between high culture and politics in Britain. In most European countries, such a pattern has historically been quite frequent. In

---

<sup>57</sup> One index of the difference is a more even distribution of women across the disciplines, in a pattern that would include—among others—names such as Theda Skocpol, Jane Collier, Anna Mellor, Svedana Alpers, Martha Nussbaum, Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow, Judith Sklar, Barbara Bergmann, Natalie Davis.

many, indeed, the normal stance of intellectuals has tended to be oppositional, swinging against the pendulum of regimes rather than with it. In England, this has not been so. Here, the larger portion of the intelligentsia has generally sung in harmony, if not unison, with the established power of the day, from the time of Coleridge's first scoring of its part after the Napoleonic wars onwards. The present position is an anomaly in this record. The one precedent for it, the extensive radicalization of the thirties, was determined more by events abroad than at home, and had less intensive impact on the academic world, yielding, at any rate in the short run, fewer intellectual results. On the other hand, its political reach through the society was far greater, creating a generous popular culture of the Left that at its height could stretch from the Rhondda pits to the Oxford Union. Between the times of Chamberlain and Thatcher, while the varieties of radical readership multiplied and the social base of the British intelligentsia broadened, the dominant structures of written production and communication became more specialized, segmented, stratified. If the development of capitalism democratizes culture, helping to prepare the long revolution foreseen by Williams, it does so in the same way that it democratizes wealth: spreading greater average levels of income or knowledge, while developing further and superior hierarchies above them.

But if no convergence of terms or audiences like that of the thirties was in sight during the eighties, the more fundamental reason was the absence of any significant political movement as a pole of attraction for intellectual opposition. The long crisis of Labourism, the short life of the Alliance, the retirement of Communism, created a vacuum that set certain unmistakable limits to the cultural turnover of these years. The one bold attempt to break the political log-jam left by the debacle of the Wilson-Callaghan years, Charter 88, was an initiative of socialist and liberal forces within the intellectual world, aiming at constitutional reform. Too radical for the Labour leadership, it was modest compared with Conservative designs. For the comprehensive programme of social engineering that gave the Thatcher regime its dynamism, the swathe of measures calculated to reshape the British social landscape and entrench the power of the Tory Party over it, elicited no alternative of similar scope. Similarly, the most powerful ideological vision of the Right, the ascendant Hayekian synthesis, remained without adequate response. Situations in which cultural production fails either to reflect or affect the political direction of a country are common enough. It was Mill who wrote that 'ideas, unless outward circumstances conspire with them, have in general no very rapid or immediate efficacy in human affairs.'<sup>58</sup> But circumstances may also circumscribe ideas themselves. Some of the necessary ones for an effective opposition were, in British conditions, still missing.

The stability of those conditions is now a thing of the past, the year 1988 closing an epoch. Since then the collapse of the Communist order in Eastern Europe and the approach of federation in Western Europe have struck away mental fixtures of Left and Right alike.

---

<sup>58</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, Toronto 1967, p. 370.



These decades were the last period during which British political life could still remain intact within the traditional framework of the UK state, while its economic foundations were increasingly integrated into the Common Market. Intellectual life may have been less internationalized than commercial or financial affairs; but it was certainly more so than parliamentary routine. The quite different context ahead will inevitably shake its dispositions into unfamiliar patterns. But whatever shape the coming European home acquires, with its probable train of homeless, one might say the world of thought is more prepared for it than that of government. Beyond the state-nation that still terms itself Great, the relationship between the two is likely to be renegotiated.

# CATALYST

MAGAZINE OF THE INDEPENDENT LEFT

## Issue No. 4: Feminism for the Nineties

Ursula Huws *Women and 1992*

Sheila Rowbotham *Working-Class Women and Feminism*

Hanna Siddiqui *Speaking Out Against Fundamentalism*

Barbara Einhorn *Women's Rights in Poland and the GDR*

Govind Kelkar *Indian Feminism*

Hilary Wainwright *The Women's High School, Goteborg, Sweden*

Subscribe now and receive a free copy of The Socialist Society's **Negotiating the Rapids: Socialist Politics for the 1990s**.

Please send me six issues of **Catalyst**. I enclose £7/US\$20

Name .....

Address .....

Return to: Catalyst (NLR), Cabin W, 25 Horsell Rd, London N6 1XL

# The Raymond Williams Memorial Fund



*'I've often defined my own social purpose as the creation of an educated and participating democracy. The WEA taught me much, in defining these terms.'*

Raymond Williams was one of the most original and prolific socialist writers in English. Like Tawney and G.D.H. Cole, he was deeply involved in the adult education movement in the formative period of his working life: for fifteen years he worked full-time as an adult-education tutor teaching more than 1,000 WEA students in every kind of class from tutorials to summer and weekend schools.

This Fund is established to help keep that tradition alive by providing bursaries for disadvantaged adult students to attend WEA residential weekends and summer schools, and to assist those engaged in radical areas of work associated with Raymond Williams.

If you wish to contribute to this appropriate memorial, please make a cheque payable to *The Raymond Williams Memorial Fund* and send it to this address:

The Raymond Williams Memorial Fund  
c/o The Secretary,  
Wedgwood Memorial College  
Barlaston  
Stoke on Trent ST12 9DG

## *comment*

Edward Thompson

# The Ends of Cold War

While I sympathize with Fred Halliday's intentions in his article on 'The Ends of Cold War',<sup>1</sup> I must disagree sharply both with its method and execution. No doubt he has been trapped by the pressure to make instant commentary (his lecture on the events of October to December 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe was delivered on 5 March 1990, and presumably written in February), and others (including myself) who were persuaded to commit ourselves too hastily to print may be criticized with equal force. But let us look at the difficulties and also at the silences and theoretical refusals of Halliday's text.

First, in the interest of clarification, I must contest Halliday's simplistic description of four 'schools' of analysis of the Cold War: one, conventional and 'realist'; two, liberal and preoccupied with contingencies; and a third school, with which I am associated, along with Mary Kaldor, Michael Cox, Noam Chomsky and Andre Gunder Frank (a somewhat disparate group), which is supposed to argue that 'the appearance of inter-bloc or inter-systemic conflict masked a homology, with both sides using, and benefiting from, the contest within their own domains of domination . . . For them cold war is itself a "system", rather than a competition between two systems.' And there is a fourth school, which is Fred Halliday's, which analysed (and analyses) the Cold War in terms of its 'inter-systemic character', the fact that it expressed the rivalry of two different social, economic and political systems.<sup>2</sup>

This clumpish grouping of 'schools', which are then glossed not in their own language but in Halliday's, is an imprecise method of intellectual argument. We have had too much of this overconfident sorting into supposed 'positions' in the past two decades. I have never used the term 'homology' in my life and I am not sure what it means. The term which I used several times, both in an article on 'Exterminism' in these pages,<sup>3</sup> and in response to critics subsequently,<sup>4</sup> was 'reciprocal' and 'reciprocity'. This disclosed not a categorical definition but a historical process of mutual formation: reciprocity (and mutual incitement) in weaponry, ideological hostilities, internal security, control of satellites and client states, and so forth.

There are good reasons why this clarification matters. To arrange a

'homology' and 'inter-systemic' conflict as opposed analyses of two different 'schools' is to confuse the fact that both views can be (although need not be) compatible with each other. In my own view there have certainly been inter-systemic conflicts which at a certain point (and in a concrete historical process) became systematized—perhaps after 1948?—giving rise to a *state* of cold war as itself a 'self-reproducing' dynamic condition. As I said in my banned Dimbleby Lecture, 'Beyond the Cold War' (1981), the Cold War 'is about itself'. Borrowing Pasternak's words, I argued that the Cold War should be seen as 'the consequences of consequences'; it had 'broken free from the occasions at its origin, and has acquired an independent inertial thrust of its own.' But in so far as the Cold War became itself a 'system' (Halliday's term and not mine), it need not utterly dissolve prior inter-systemic rivalries, but may incorporate these as part of the very driving force of ideological incitements. So Halliday's 'schools' are spurious, and we are back with the need for more precise (and also more empirically informed) analysis.

### Categoric Systems or Reciprocal Process?

Halliday supposes that the events of recent months have settled the argument on his side. He does not tell us exactly what his two 'systems' are, except that one is capitalism and the other is not-capitalism. He cannot now use *socialism* or *communism* without embarrassment, but his major categoric revision of the other system is to place 'communism' in quotation marks. His article is a 'claim that 1989 has been the test of theories of cold war.' And he asserts triumphantly that 'the jury is no longer out', since the autumn 1989 events prove that the 'end' (that is, aim) of cold war was 'systematic homogeneity and the target the socio-economic and political character of the core states of each bloc.' He returns to this argument on page 12 and his position should be inspected with care: 'For the end of the Cold War... and the prevailing climate of detente in Europe and most of the Third World, are being achieved not on the basis of a convergence of the two systems or of a negotiated truce between them, but on the basis of the collapse of one in the face of the other. This means nothing less than the defeat of the communist project as it has been known in the twentieth century and the triumph of the capitalist. This is so evidently the case that it provides retrospective validation of the inter-systemic interpretation of the Cold War.' Or, as he writes later (notice again the coy quotation marks), 'to speak in the language of "old thinking", what we are now witnessing is class struggle on an international scale, as the superior strength of Western capitalism forces open the societies partially closed to it for four or more decades.'

But I and most of my colleagues in 'school three'—and in the non-aligned peace movement—never predicted the end of the Cold War in a 'convergence of two systems', nor even (except as an interim detente) as a negotiated truce between the antagonists. Indeed the stasis of the Cold War itself relied on a kind of non-dialectical

<sup>1</sup> *NLR* 180, March–April 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *NLR* 121, May–June 1980.

<sup>3</sup> In 'Extremism Reviewed', in *Extremism and Cold War*, Verso, London 1982.

'convergence' of opposites, who played according to the same rules. We worked for the displacement of the Cold War by altogether new systems of international relations, the breakdown of bipolar confrontation. By proposing the problem in the way that he does, and by glossing our interpretative vocabulary to suit his own ends, Halliday predicates precisely the conclusions he wishes to reach. If we talk about 'homology' and a cold war 'system' (his terms) we may be predisposed to reach his conclusions; if we talk about 'reciprocity', 'inertial thrust', 'self-reproducing dynamic', then we are talking about a real historical process and not categoric 'systems', and the events of the autumn of 1989 may then be seen both as a conclusion to one historical era and the initiation of another. In a logic of reciprocal interaction, if one side withdraws it may have profound effects upon the other, just as the wrestler who suddenly loses an antagonist may fall to the ground.

Secondly, is it not time for me to withdraw my theses about 'exterminism'? Several critics have found these to be overdrawn, and suggest them to have been disproved by events post-1985. In the sense that I allowed in the suggestion that 'exterminism' was a *determined* historical process, some of the criticisms are just.<sup>4</sup> But I should add that this essay was written early in 1980, before a mass peace movement had arisen, and indeed that its bleak and intransigent tone was influenced by this fact and by my desire to challenge what I supposed to be a political 'immobilism' among sophisticated Western Marxists. Of greater significance is the fact that the exterminism theses were put forward as the negative theses, whose positive alternatives were set forth in my 'Beyond the Cold War' lecture of 1981.<sup>5</sup> This lecture never received the attention that 'exterminism' did—least of all in Marxist circles—and yet, looking back from 1990, it may appear to be more prescient and, indeed, to offer a script which prefigures the events of autumn 1989.

I write this not in self-congratulation—after all, if one offers a pessimistic and also an optimistic future scenario, one of them is likely to be nearer the mark than the other—but in order to stress that the argument was never just about 'exterminism' as a doomed structural determinism, but was also always an argument about how to break out of this doomed logic to alternative possibilities. Together with other activists in the nonaligned peace movements I placed a very strong emphasis on the ideological content of the Second Cold War. As I wrote in late 1983, 'It is ideology, even more than military-industrial pressures, which is the driving-motor of the Cold War... It is as if... ideology has broken free from the existential socio-

<sup>4</sup> Constructive articles include: Simon Bromley and Justin Rosenberg, 'After Exterminism', *NLR* 168, March–April 1988; Michael Sukhov, 'E.P. Thompson and the Practice of Theory', in *Socialism and Democracy*, Autumn/Winter 1989; Martin Shaw, 'Exterminism and Historical Pacifism', in Harvey Kaye and Keith McLelland, eds., *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, London 1990. I tried to clarify my views in 'Exterminism Reviewed' in the *Verso* volume, and I there accepted Raymond Williams's criticism of my metaphor of exterminism as a mode of production. See also my 'Ends and Histories' in Mary Kaldor, ed., *Europe from Below: An East-West Dialogue*, Verso, London forthcoming 1991.

<sup>5</sup> 'Beyond the Cold War' was published as a Merlin/INN pamphlet, at the end of 1981, reprinted in *Zero Option*, London 1982, and in the US as *Beyond the Cold War*, New York 1982.

economic matrix within which it was nurtured and is no longer subject to any control of rational self-interest. Cold War II is a replay of Cold War I, but this time as deadly farce: the content of real interest-conflict between the two superpowers is low, but the content of ideological rancour and "face" is dangerously high.<sup>6</sup> Our argument was never confined to some interactionism of weapons-systems (especially nuclear), as has sometimes been supposed. The peace movement's work was not only to oppose but also to expose and to demystify the malodorous vocabulary of nuclear weapons, to disclose them as not only weapons but also symbolic rhetoric, for 'the suppression of politics... and the substitution of the threat of annihilation for the negotiated resolution of differences'. Hence, the Cold War's arrest of political process, the degenerative stasis of the condition.

Third, if we put the problem back into the terms of our analysis, rather than Halliday's gloss, some large conclusions might follow. The events of autumn 1989, when the ideological barricades of forty years began to break open, might seem to confirm our analysis rather than Halliday's. But the 'jury is still out'. If we replace 'homology' with more dialectical notions of reciprocal process, then this process has only just begun. The test will be in the eventuation of the next four or five years. No-one in the non-aligned peace movement ever supposed that events must proceed in lock-step on both sides of the divided globe. But if our analysis had any virtue, we can expect very substantial ideological and political changes to ensue now in the West. Already Western commentators are bemoaning the loss of a convenient enemy 'Other', just as the space and nuclear arms contractors in the USA are complaining that they are 'hurting'. In every presidential election for forty-five years, the Right in America has set the parameters of debate in terms of 'security' and the Soviet threat, and other domestic as well as international issues have been silenced in that deafening propaganda. Already there are premonitions that this kind of suppression of politics can not long continue in the USA, let alone in Western Europe. At the same time, the political and ideological controls over satellite and client states are weakening in NATO as well as in the Warsaw Pact. If the Cold War is no longer 'self-reproducing', we can expect other (more traditional, less mystifying and less ideological) pressures to reassert themselves. But let us wait a few months before we decide that it is 'capitalism' which has triumphed *that count*.

### Writing Out the Popular Movements

Fourth, the paragraph which I have just written is a great deal too passive in tone. And Halliday's passivity (in pursuit of, supposedly objective analysis) is quite extraordinary. At not one single point, in some twenty pages of analysis of the ends of the Cold War, does he make even a passing mention of the peace movements. Presumably he sees the Western peace movement as a piece of empty charade (perhaps misdirected) which had no influence upon historical

<sup>6</sup> *The Heavy Dancers*, London 1985, p. 44.

eventuation. Of course, those of us who ate, drank and lived the peace movement obsessively for nearly a decade, will not wish to admit our total irrelevance. We have a vested interest in supposing otherwise. We also have a few arguments. I have argued that it was the non-aligned peace movement in the West entering into dialogue and certain common actions with the human-rights movement in the East which gave rise to the 'ideological moment' when the Cold War lock was broken. Mary Kaldor has reminded us that in 1981-83, when millions demonstrated in the capitals of Western Europe, 'the movements were comparable in scale to the democracy movements in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s'—and perhaps influenced the latter. Halliday, who can find space to mention the influence of pop music and of Finnish TV in Estonia, maintains total silence about any movements for peace. Yet in the first half of the decade, the NATO establishments had the fright of their lives and lived through successive emergencies which they negotiated only by exercising every means of media manipulation and political influence—West German, Dutch, Italian and British elections, the NATO referendum in Spain. I remain convinced that NATO's allocation of cruise missiles would have been rejected by Britain if General Galtieri had not come to Mrs Thatcher's rescue.

On the other side, war (1917-20 and 1941-45 and the expectation of invasion in the 1930s) and cold war thereafter were necessary conditions for the historical formation of Stalinism and of its Brezhnevite aftermath: in the exaltation of military priorities, the imposition of command economies and suppression of consumer demand, the enhancement of ideological paranoia, the strengthening of internal security forces, the 'two camps' diplomacies, the outlawing of dissent, and all the rest. This is not to say that there were not strong internal social forces confluent with external pressures—and I find Moshe Lewin's suggestive study *The Gorbachev Phenomenon*<sup>7</sup> especially helpful for the understanding of these—but the current intellectual fashion of attributing a vaguely defined 'generic Stalinism' to the original bad faith of 'Marxism' is as disreputable as was last year's fashionable celebration of the guillotine as the authentic outcome of the Enlightenment. Halliday is never guilty of these follies, except in so far as he can only see the end of the Cold War as a defeat for 'socialism' or for not-capitalism, and not as a reopening of closed possibilities, partly in consequence of popular pressures from both sides.

Why does Halliday keep this extraordinary silence as to the role of popular movements in bringing the Cold War to an end? I suggest that it might be because of an ulterior theoretical refusal. He insists on reducing all analysis to 'two camps' thinking—capitalism versus not-capitalism or 'communism', as 'systems'—and refuses absolutely to explore the possibility of 'third ways'. They are ruled out of court, categorically. This is an old habit of the editors and contributors who have conducted *New Left Review* so tenaciously since the early 1960s. While they are willing to employ copiously the somewhat empty (and in my view culturally relativist) term 'the Third World', the very

---

<sup>7</sup> London 1987, due to be updated this year.

possibility of a 'third way'—or a fourth or a fifth—or, indeed, of a reopening field of possibility, in which new variants of social formation and new combinations of old and newer modes of production might be expected to arise, is ruled out of order as a categorical impossibility. Hence Halliday's essay—see especially its penultimate paragraph on page 23—has to conclude as an obituary upon not only command Communism and 'really existing socialism', but upon any alternative to capitalist society. The profound pessimism of his position is only the other side to the coin of Western capitalist triumphalism, and it shares the same premisses.

But we are reminded that this is not only a complex theoretical issue; one that I wish NLR would open to informed debate. It is not just a question of re-examining that moment in 1945–47 when in France, Poland and (subsequently) in Yugoslavia, India and elsewhere, the issue was raised as theory. It is also a question of real movements and of political *practices*. In my view the movements and the practices may now well be ahead of the theorists. In the peace and human-rights movements of the 1980s, and their associated or supportive 'new social movements', the 'third way' emerged on a substantial scale not as theory only but as real social forces: as a historical *fact*.

#### Observers Only?

And this is my fifth point. Such 'facts' do not only demand intelligent observation and analysis—at which NLR has always been good—but they also require active support. They are sustained by *practices*. I have been impelled to write this comment, not only because I disagree with Halliday's analysis, but also because I think that something more than analysis is called for in 1990. For if we take the 'reciprocity' view of the Cold War, then whether or not the breakdown of that condition is a triumph for aggressive Western capitalism, or is an opportunity for the 'third way' to grow in strength in both East and West, discovering common projects and a common vocabulary, remains undecided and depends upon what we do. The jury will not stay out forever. Nothing is more discouraging than the failure of the Western peace movement and progressive forces to move into the spaces of opportunity which have opened; the failure to hasten on reciprocal process in the West to match the decomposition of Cold War ideological controls in the East. And Halliday's pat return to two-camps thinking (albeit with one camp now prostrate and utterly defeated) signals a retreat to the immobilism of which I accused theoretical Marxism in 1980.

At the same time, one does not have to be an 'expert' to know how bookish are some of the notions of 'market economies' held by dissidents (old-style) in their book-lined apartments in Prague, Budapest and Moscow: obsessively fixated by the profound pessimism of 1984 and of notions of 'totalitarianism' (which have been refuted in part by their own actions), committed to laughably abstract prescriptions from Hayek, Milton Friedman or American neo-conservatives—prescriptions which have no serious relevance to Western capitalist realities, let alone to the relevance to the as-yet-undiagnosed ailments of command economies in decomposition.



Some of these dissidents are courageous intellectuals whose teeth have been set on edge by persecution as well as by the horrors of 'really existing socialism', and until very recently I have thought it was more important to listen to them, and to show solidarity with them in their struggle for human rights, than to argue with them. But I think that the argument must now be joined, in as direct and friendly ways as possible. One is irritated only when some of these intellectuals refuse any serious dialogue, refuse to recognize that a significant section of the Western Left has shared their abhorrence of Stalinism and has actively given evidence of their solidarity with them over the decades—when they not only refuse this knowledge but prefer not to know, and prefer to engage in dialogue (as unequal partners) with lavishly funded Western diplomatic and Cold War agencies. This was perhaps the outcome to be expected: the construction of truly internationalist discourse must always be the work of minorities whose voices are lost in the hubbub of money and power's camp followers; and small outfits like END, or European Forum, must patiently start the construction once more.

Yet something has been done in the past that we may build upon: something which Halliday fails even to mention. And there might even be powerful auxiliaries (and more than auxiliaries) coming to our aid from huge circles which have not been involved in earlier exchanges. How can we know yet how political consciousness may be changing 'on the other side', and what struggles over priorities, basic defences of the right to work, housing and health, the allocation of resources, the social control of public wealth, will ensue when working people over there really come to understand what 'free' market forces mean? Already (May 1990) Lech Walesa has put out one fire in the Gdansk shipyards and checked the Polish rail strike: but his one-man fire brigade cannot postpone the crisis for ever. Why should we prejudge the play's last act when the first act is not yet concluded? And who will be the KOS to advise and bring solidarity to the new (Gdansk or Siberian) strikers? And what larger social projects and programmes—as envisaged by Boris Kagarlitsky or Jiri Sabbata—will we soon observe? And will we be observers only, or will we begin to find our way towards common, internationalist programmes?

I ask only that we should take a hand in writing alternative scripts, and should not wait passively for all the scripts to be written by the Western media, politicians and business interests, while we act as a kind of profoundly pessimistic self-flagellant chorus. I hear on every side today fearful warnings as to the growth of 'Fascism' as well as anti-semitism, nationalism, fundamentalism, and so forth, on the other side. And on this side too. And in the 'Third World'. Precisely so. That is what happens in a vacuum, and when no alternative internationalist script or affirmative values are defended. But what worries me almost as much is the profound intellectual distaste (even contempt) of working people which is found equally among Western circles of liberal or (post) modern intellectuals and certain circles of human-rights intellectuals over there. There are real historical reasons for this, in that aftermath of populist reactionary regimes as well as

conformist Communist ones. Yet I remain worried less by the manifest crisis of Marxism (which had that deservedly coming to it) than by the loss of conviction, even on the Left, in the practices and values of democracy. But the end of the Cold War has—and on both sides—seen a revival of these practices and a reaffirmation of these values, in the self-activity of masses who moved outside orthodox ideological and political stockades. And we should still see this as a moment of opportunity, not defeat.

### The Third Way

Finally, these last paragraphs are not in fairness addressed to Fred Halliday. Rather they express my own preoccupations, some of which he may share. If I have been a little sharp in contesting (through the case of Halliday's article) a tendency in the NLR to foreclose or to refuse certain issues ever since some of us parted with the Board in the early 1960s, I would like to express my solidarity in other areas. Some of us feared in 1962 that NLR might give way before a sentimental and guilt-stricken Third Worldism (of the Sartre/Fanon variety) which would, in effect, evade the necessary engagements within our own society. This has not proved to be the case, and Fred Halliday's consistent essays in the interpretation of Western capitalist intervention in the Middle East and Asia have contributed positively to the Review's pages for two decades. I share his sense of the total and irrevocable collapse of the orthodox Communist tradition in the events of the past year. Those of us actively involved in the 'border-crossing' work of the peace movement in the past decade, theoretical as well as practical, may have been more prepared for this than were others, since we had long sensed that a collapse was imminent. I share also his concern that—in the aftermath of this overdue collapse—there has been in both East and West a 'capitulation to all sorts of regressive ideologies of a nationalist, familialist and religious character', some of these in the name of a (post) 'Marxism', or supposedly 'critical' theory. I feel solidarity with Halliday in his attempt to rediscover some vocabulary of rationality and of rehabilitated universals, and his repudiation of the 'misplaced indulgence of religious bigotry masquerading as anti-racism shown by sections of the liberal intelligentsia', and 'the pursuit of "national traditions" by erstwhile components of the international communist movement.' The causes of rationality and internationalism and some (if not all) of the causes of the Enlightenment now require—in the face of their modish unpopularity—stubborn defenders; and one welcomes Halliday and other NLR contributors among these: they are traditions which the rational Left inherits and can lay claim to, alongside all the mountains of obscurantism and of bad faith which have been exposed to view (and exposed often by critics from within the Left). I mean only to insist that these are not only theories and traditions. They are also practices and even social movements. They exist in the real worlds of East, West and South; and if we refuse theoretical legitimacy to any third way, we diminish them. We cannot know what spaces the third way might inherit, after the collapse of the Cold War, unless we press in practice beyond the old 'two camps' thinking and find out.

## Fred Halliday    A Reply to Edward Thompson

Despite the evident disagreements between us, and a certain measure of misunderstanding, I find Edward Thompson's comment welcome and stimulating. The overriding issues that confront us all concern the future, on which, as he himself makes clear, there is far more that unites than divides us. There are, however, a number of points he raises where some dissenting reply may be in order. These are: the interpretation of his argument on exterminism; the evaluation of European events over the last few months; the role of the peace movement; the plausibility of a 'third way'.

Thompson disputes my division of theories of cold war into four broad schools and in particular my inclusion of his 'exterminism' thesis in what I term the internalist school, that is one which sees the Cold War as a product of comparable forces operating within the two blocs, forces for whom the Cold War is in varying respects functional. As I argued in NLR 180 and in *The Making of the Second Cold War*, no one can deny the force of internal factors within the two blocs, but on its own such an argument is misleading in two respects: (1) it understates the degree of contestation and rivalry between the blocs—that is, the degree to which each remained committed to *prevailing* over the other; (2) it overstates how similar the structures were within each bloc, and in so doing failed to see how far Cold War was a product of the very difference, the heterogeneity of socio-economic systems, between them. I do not think, as he seems to do, that the ideological element in East-West relations was separate from the material interests involved.

Thompson may not like the word 'homology' but it is in meaning very similar to the equally un-Anglo-Saxon term 'isomorphism' which appears liberally in his exterminism essay. Both denote a similarity or identity of structure. 'Homology' is the best I can do to denote the argument that the sources of the Cold War are similar within the two blocs, and that, in his case, these sources are to be found in a military-social dynamic which he terms 'exterminism'. The category 'reciprocity' as he explains it in his comment seems to bear this interpretation out: that the Cold War was driven by forces within each bloc that, through reciprocal interaction, more and more came to resemble each other. After all, the central argument of that text is that whatever differences in social system may have underlain the Cold War in its inception, the predominance of the arms race and arms manufacture has produced a similarity: his stress on 'isomorphism' was in part designed to rebut traditional and apologetic left arguments about the differences between the capitalist and non-capitalist systems.

Thompson repeats his view that the Cold War is 'about itself', and it is this that seems to me to lie at the heart of our disagreement. It was precisely on this point that a number of us, myself and Mike Davis included, sought to provide an alternative interpretation of cold war

in the early 1980s based on the view of cold war as an inter-systemic conflict—that is, a global, ultimately irreconcilable, conflict between two different kinds of society and political system, within which the arms race played an important but not determinant role. These differences are not the result of some current rashness; they have been clear for at least eight years: the collection of essays, *Exterminism and Cold War*, published in 1982, to which Thompson, Davis, myself and several others contributed, was precisely an attempt to debate the arguments of Thompson's original essay. One of the reasons why the peace movement shied away from this inter-systemic approach was that it sounded rather too much like conventional Cold War ideology—either in its Western, 'freedom' versus 'communism' variant, or in the orthodox, apologetic, Soviet position of 'socialism' versus 'imperialism'. Thompson tries to shove me back into such a dogmatic left box, but in so doing, it is he who is helping to foreclose an intellectual and political space that the cold warriors also want to keep shut, namely that of seeing in a non-dogmatic way how different social and economic interests on both sides are expressed in and through cold war.

My argument about the events of the past few months is that what has happened is what inter-systemic conflict theory would have suggested: namely that rivalry of the blocs will end once systemic heterogeneity is drastically reduced or disappears. What we have seen is not just a reduction in military tension but a prevailing of one socio-economic system over the other. The collapse of the Communist regimes constitutes precisely such a process, which is still in train, in so far as the West, under the rubric of 'conditionality', is making financial and commercial assistance dependent upon the introduction of capitalist reforms in these countries. It should not be surprising that this is the way things are going. This is the way the capitalist system works.

Here I would argue that Thompson's account of these events retains an element of wishful thinking, although the tone of his comment printed here is rather at variance with his, in my view, more accurate and sober assessment published in *The Guardian* on 3 July. On the one hand, he suggests that the victory of the West may not turn out to be such a victory after all, and compares it to a wrestler who is thrown off balance when his opponent slips. But the real analogy is in Clausewitz's use of wrestling to describe the goal of strategy, which is not to annihilate but *niederwerfen*, to 'throw down' the opponent: the capitalist West has not lost its antagonist, it has subjugated it, nowhere more so than in the takeover of the GDR by Bonn. There has not been reciprocal interaction, but a victory of one side over the other. On the other hand, he suggests that what the peace movement proposed was 'new systems of inter-national relations': this is what the peace movement proposed, but it is not what it got. What we have is a strengthening of the institutions of one side in the face of the collapse of those on the other. NATO and the EC have become more accommodating, but as a function of their new strength. The Warsaw Pact, for all current piety, is as dead as the League of Nations, and Comecon may follow suit. Of course, assessment of what the outcome is depends on what one is looking at: if inter-bloc military tension is the

sole focus, then there has been reciprocal but unequal reduction of threat; if socio-economic and political competition is the issue, then one side can be seen to be the winner.

Thompson chides me for ignoring the role of the peace movement, and he is, in one sense, right to do so: much as it pains me to say it, I do not think that the peace movement played a major role in bringing about the end of the Cold War. Here I can only quote the telling sentence from the end of Thompson's own exterminism essay: 'The end of politics is to act, and to act *with effect*' (HPT's italics). The question is what the effect was. In the conclusion to *The Making of the Second Cold War*, written in early 1983, I argued that, for all the mass mobilizations and appeals across party lines involved, the goal of a peace movement had to be to influence political processes: this meant elected or established governments. Beyond generic statements of influence, one has to look at what actually happened in Western Europe in this period. In no country within NATO was a government elected that opposed the deployment of cruise and Pershing, let alone opposed continued membership of NATO: the nearest was in the German elections of March 1983, but Kohl was returned, the SPD retreated, and the Greens later lost their momentum. Later, in Holland, the peace movement almost got a majority against cruise deployment, but in the end that failed too. These were close-run things, but the reality is that NATO proceeded with its policies on INF deployment, there was no concerted opposition to SDI, and few even seriously raised the key issue, that of leaving NATO. Thompson's interpretation of the British possibilities had there not been a Falklands War may or may not be valid—I doubt it. What was most striking throughout the height of the peace movement was that while many in Britain expressed doubts about cruise deployment, this happened, the Thatcher government that carried it through was re-elected and even regarded this issue as a vote winner, and there was never more than a small minority in favour of leaving NATO—hence the equivocations of CND on this issue. The fate of the freeze movement and of SANE in the USA was little different.

It may be said that the peace movement played a role in another respect, namely in influencing developments in the East. Quoting Mary Kaldor, Thompson says that the peace movements of the West 'perhaps' influenced those of the East. Thompson and Kaldor can evaluate this better than I: there is no doubt that the movements of the East were influenced by some aspects of the movements in the West—concerning democracy, human rights, environment, and, in the GDR at least, feminism. But whether the Western peace movements had an influence on the issue of peace—that is, deployment of arms—itself is more debatable: many in the East, not least those most opposed to their own Communist regimes, wanted the West to stand firm on INF—there were plenty of such voices within Solidarity. The process of disarmament that began in earnest in 1987 came as a result of state-to-state relations, not of pressure from below within the USSR or anywhere else; the democratic turn in the East has been a great advance, but it has not involved a two-sided, reciprocal, rejection of both systems, so much as a transition from one to the other. Those who have propounded a third way, as in East Germany, have, quite simply, been swept aside by the combined

pressures of their own populations and Western state and financial intervention.

The one area where Western peace-movement thinking did find an echo was in theories of 'minimal deterrence' and 'defensive defence'; yet these ideas did, as developed within the USSR, imply the retention of some nuclear weapons and, while their enunciation in the early 1980s was to be found in the West, their previous formulation had, of course, been within the USSR, by Khrushchev in the early 1960s. Thompson puts the words 'empty charade' into my mouth to describe the peace movement: this is to confuse the issue, one of sober historical assessment. This must, in my reluctant view, show that the peace movement, for all its great exertions, was, in the political terms in which its success has to be evaluated, defeated.

So much for the past. Thompson regards my analysis as passive and defeatist. Here, apart from calling me 'coy', is perhaps the largest misunderstanding in his comment. Let me restate my concluding argument, not one of defeatism but of realism: the starting point for a future politics has to be the critique of existing capitalist society and the laying out of alternatives to it that are both desirable and plausible. Thompson himself talks of a 'third way': yes, but no society embodying such a third way has been produced in the contemporary world despite many attempts to do so, and much of what masqueraded as 'third' was in reality one or other of the first two in disguise. The term 'non-aligned' which he uses is not quite as solid as might appear: what is striking about the 'Non-Aligned Movement' is that it has found only a marginal support in Europe (Yugoslavia, Malta, Cyprus) and the majority of European neutrals preferred an atomized, low-key, approach to international issues, not the constitution of a third bloc.<sup>1</sup> All these countries were, moreover, in political and socio-economic terms not 'third' at all, but estranged members of one or other bloc. If this third alternative is to be elaborated, and if it is to command the political support needed democratically to implement it, then it has to avoid much of the woolly thinking, about economic, political and military matters that has characterized so much left analysis in the past. Those of us involved in NLR in the 1960s and 1970s could be taxed with having contributed at least as much to voluntarism as to fatalism: a sober, but combative, assessment of the end of cold war may help us all to avoid both in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> I have gone into this in greater detail in 'European Neutralism and Cold War Politics: A Harder Look', Sheffield Papers in International Studies, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, Sheffield s10 2TN.

# *new left review*

## *Why Not Subscribe to NLR Today?*

### The advantages of subscribing:

1. We send you **FREE** a back issue of your choice plus any other back issues at a reduced rate (see inside back cover for details).
2. At current subscription rates (see inside front cover) you receive six issues annually for less than the price of five bought individually.
3. You can buy any number of Verso books at 20% discount from our book club, NLRE.
4. You make sure that you don't miss an issue.

Write to our subscriptions department today with your full name, address and postcode/zipcode, indicating the issue with which your subscription is to begin and your choice of free back issue. Enclose either cheque made payable to *New Left Review* or credit card type, number and expiry date (Visa, Access, Mastercard, Eurocard, AmEx accepted).

**nt**

**naše teme** OUR THEMES — INTERNATIONAL EDITION

### Review of Social Issues

"Naše teme"/"Our themes", the leading Yugoslav review of social issues, is starting, under the abbreviated title **nt**, an international edition in three issues a year, predominantly in English, on about 400 pages per issue.

### MAIN TOPICS IN FIRST THREE ISSUES:

Crisis of Yugoslavia • "Memorandum" of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts • Public Opinion in Zagreb '87 and '88 • Czechoslovakia between Two Reforms (1968-1985) • Governing Zagreb • A Critique of Political Economy • Basic Problems of History of Yugoslavia • Changes in Yugoslavia's Political and Social System • Losses in Yugoslav Financial System (You will also obtain an extensive survey of Yugoslav book and journal production)

Annual Subscription Rate: USD 45 (or CAD 60, AUD 58, GBP 29, DEM 86, FRF 287, CHF 72). Please remit the amount to our account No.: UBH, Zagrebačka banka, Zagreb, 25731-3277283 /za "Naše teme"/. Send orders to: naše teme, Opatička 10/II, 41000 Zagreb, Yugoslavia.

document

Otto Latsis

## Farewell to the Communist Party in Latvia

During its 25th Congress, the 86-year-old Communist Party of Latvia split in two.\* A third of the Congress delegates walked out, and several days later, on 14 April, the founding congress of the new Independent Communist Party of Latvia was held. A small group of people, headed by the Party's former first secretary, Jan Vagris, tried to avert the split, but in vain. Neither the majority nor the minority at the congress left any room for conciliation, and both sides appeared satisfied with the outcome.

I was in Riga during the few days between the first congress and the second. I read the local newspapers, listened to the radio and talked with various people, including the leaders of both parties. I heard as though in a dream various rumours about the division of property, newspapers, journals and party subscriptions, and about the setting up of new organizational structures. Yet I heard almost nothing about the things which were crying out to be discussed. Such as that the Communist Party of Latvia—the party of the majority—contains virtually no Latvians. 'A Latvian Communist Party with no Latvians in it is nonsense', rightly observed *For The Motherland*, the newspaper of the Baltic Military District. With no peasants or members of the cultural intelligentsia either, one might add, and with almost no support from industrial workers or scientists. Suffice it to say that the new first secretary of the Central Committee of the CPL, Alfred Rubiks, who for many years had headed the executive committee of the Riga soviet, lost this post in the spring elections. Yet it is here in Riga, where Russian speakers made up two-thirds of the population, that the Communist Party of Latvia draws its main support.

In the new Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Republic, the CPL does not command even a third of the votes needed to veto any change to the Constitution. The party of the minority, however, although it carried great weight with the native Latvian population when it was part of the united CPL, cannot now count on any serious influence. A Communist Party founded on an ethnic base (not according to its programme, but in fact) is also nonsense. It will be influential in isolated

---

\* This article was originally published in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiya*, 18 April 1990.



rural districts, but will have almost no influence in the major towns, or in the countryside either. A party, moreover, which still has no slogans or strategies to attract the republic's Russian-speaking citizens, who make up 48 per cent of the population. In short, as a result of the split, Latvia's Communists, who have ruled the republic for half a century, have now become the political opposition.

The majority in the Latvian Supreme Soviet consists of a collection of movements and parties which are all now demanding independence from the USSR. The minority Independent Communist Party of Latvia joined this alliance, but not as its leading force. The ICPL's presence there is subordinated to the far more powerful Latvian Popular Front, which although not formally a party, is increasingly seen as such. Various well-known figures in the republic who set up the Front have one by one left the leadership to behold their creation with amazement. When the Front was formed in 1988, most of its members categorically, and I am sure sincerely, rejected the notion of independence from the USSR. Independence suddenly began to be widely discussed in the spring of 1989, and the idea is by now already widely accepted, with only tactical questions remaining to be debated.

If it is genuinely better for the people of Latvia to turn their backs on two centuries in Russia and half a century in the Soviet Union, then so be it. Imperialist greed is an unreliable and impractical basis for politics in our century. But I am convinced that the Latvians have not yet had the chance calmly to consider their own best interests or the kind of future they want. It is as though people are in a trance. All the arguments I have heard for leaving the Soviet Union are based on the events of the past. We cannot change the past, only the future. Yet the factors which will define this future are never discussed.

Latvian people are deeply shocked by the recently emerging facts of their own history. They have been swindled, they are far worse off than the small independent countries bordering on the USSR. Fifty years ago, unenthusiastic but unresisting, they became part of the USSR as their best defence against the Hitlerite dictatorship—a very real danger, which had by then engulfed almost the whole of Europe excluding Great Britain and the USSR. But it did not defend them, and Latvia had to endure all the horrors of Nazi occupation. It then endured the horrors of the Stalinist dictatorship, followed by a decade of stagnation, which, according to a number of objective indicators, reduced a country that had formerly held its own with the economically developed countries of Europe to the ranks of the most backward of them.

History has now presented the Latvians with yet another paradox: many of those who cursed Stalin's Soviet Union now want to break loose from the Soviet Union of Gorbachev too. Yet if this is the same 'empire', the same 'regime of occupation' (how easily these phrases spring to people's lips nowadays!), how is it that we can freely discuss secession, prepare for secession, and elect to the Latvian Supreme Soviet a majority in favour of secession? And if things have changed, why is it necessary to be in such a rush, rather than to discuss everything rationally?

Rational discussion has not been helped, however, by the majority in the CPL and its affiliated 'Interfront', which claims to minister to the needs of the Russian-speaking population. Their stubborn, even haughty refusal to acknowledge the bitter truths about our past does not help to convince Latvians that the Soviet Union is in the process of genuine reform. The opposing sides' forces are roughly equal. Neither side can possibly resolve any of Latvia's problems by ignoring the interests of the other. Yet both sides still spend far more of their energy in attempting to defeat their opponents with empty rhetoric than in seeking reconciliation and mutually acceptable solutions.

Of course the Soviet central government has not been above reproach, for the protracted piratical behaviour of its industrial managers and its extreme reluctance to learn from the experiences of the Soviet Congress of Peoples' Deputies. Its most conspicuous failure has been its refusal to open negotiations on a new Soviet treaty as soon as the idea was first mooted. This is a separate issue, however, which concerns all the republics and merits separate discussion. Here I want merely to draw attention to the chief danger facing Latvia at the moment: the fact that the main parties in the political struggle have not taken the trouble to study their own best interests, and are walking blindfold towards an uncertain future. It is not only the Latvians who should take a sober look at what is happening. There are lessons here for the whole country as we approach the equally acrimonious and emotional debates of the 28th Party Congress. I have no revelations to offer. I have no monopoly on the truth; we must all seek it together. But I do want to draw attention to several facts about our past and our present, which we forget at our peril. I shall refer wherever possible to my own personal experiences and to those of people I know. I hope this will not appear presumptuous; I have learnt that the perceptions we arrive at on our own are far more powerful than borrowed clichés.

### A Short History of the CPL

I myself have never been a member of the Latvian Communist Party, and have always worked for it as an outsider, but I am not indifferent to its fate. My father gave fifty years of his life to the Communist Party of Latvia, and this fact determined the very circumstances of my birth. My father joined the Party in 1921, when membership offered neither wealth nor career, but prison and the bullet. The bullet awaited his old childhood friend Eduard Smiltens, who in 1933 was caught by the police at a conspiratorial flat in Riga used for publishing the Latvian Komsomol newspaper. Smiltens was shot forthwith in the street 'while attempting to escape'. In 1937 the Stalinist government caught up with his wife in Moscow, so thanks to the efforts of two successive governments Smiltens's children were orphaned. My father was merely thrown into prison: he was arrested in Riga in 1928 for belonging to the Cultural Society of Workers, and he escaped a longer sentence only by emigrating to the Soviet Union: the Latvian secret police were clearly anxious that I should not be born in Latvia, where my ancestors had lived for centuries.

My father always remained a rank-and-file member of the Party, and

by the standards of this stormy century he led a fairly ordinary life, taking in two wars, which were finally to bring him home. Demographers now tell us that of 200,000 Latvians living in the Soviet Union before 1937, 70,000 died. That means virtually every adult male. My father used to tell me that after he returned from Spain (where it was far less dangerous at the front than in Moscow), he found that almost everything from his old life had been destroyed: the Latvian section of the Comintern, Latvia's 'Prometheus' publishing house and hundreds of his friends and acquaintances had all vanished without trace. I shall not list a lot of important names—all innocent victims deserve pity, whatever their rank, and it is not possible to name everyone who died. I want to talk about something else. Hypocritically hiding behind the name of the Revolution, Stalin dealt a savage blow to members of the Party which had sent such an extraordinarily large number of its sons to serve the Revolution. This stab in the back did not destroy the faith of those who survived: their choice was determined by the inevitable battle with Fascism that loomed ahead. How many attacks like this did the Latvians need to convince them that their grandfathers had been wrong to support the Russian Revolution in October?

For the people of little Latvia, 1937 was not the first big bloodletting of the twentieth century. Nor was it the last. During the war, in the Russian village of Simonovo outside Staraya Russa, on the road to Moscow, where my father's military career was halted by serious injury, his company contained 120 men in the morning, and by the evening there were only 20 left. The 43rd Latvian Guards Division fought on outside Staraya Russa for several months. Nor did the sacrifices end with the war. Ahead lay the deportation of the 'class enemies' in 1949. I was told about this by a survivor named Voldemar Indzer, a friend and comrade of my father from the Latvian Communist underground of the 1920s. Indzer had also been arrested for belonging to the Cultural Society of Workers, and he had been sentenced by the Latvian court in 1929 to three years in prison. Beria's system of 'justice' in 1949 dispensed with trials, but it never missed its mark. Gestapo members, criminals and members of the pro-German Russian Vlasovite army were all thrown together into one cell, expecting to receive sentences of ten, fifteen or twenty-five years. The Communists, who had completed the sentences passed during the 1937 'purge' and had now been arrested a second time, generally without any new charge, would invariably return uttering the one word: 'Life'.

All this passed, as did the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, which restored the names of many Latvian Communists to our history. But the dark days were not yet over. Ahead lay one more blow, not a bloody blow this time, but politically the most difficult of all for Communists in Latvia, since it came three years after the 20th Party Congress, and thus could only mean that socialism had still not purged itself of Stalinism. What happened in 1959 is still a painful wound in the soul of the Latvian people. In that year a group of Latvian Communist Party leaders—artists, writers and scientists—were accused of bourgeois nationalism, investigated by the Party and

dismissed from their posts. Some were found 'guilty' of raising the same painful problem of Latvia's economy and culture which we are now trying belatedly, and in much worse conditions, to solve. Others were charged with even worse crimes. Communists, partisans, former underground members and war veterans, Latvians, Russians and Byelorussians were all branded as Latvian bourgeois nationalists (generally understood to be a synonym for Latvian fascism).

All this happened at the July plenary of the Latvian Communist Party Central Committee in 1959. In his final word to the plenary, the then first secretary of the Central Committee, Jan Kalnberzin, paid fulsome tribute to the courage of the genuine internationalists, the Latvian Guards Division who had defended Moscow. This was quite appropriate. Amongst those attending the plenary were six veterans of the battle for Moscow. All six of them had been slandered as 'nationalists'. Who was judging whom? Many non-Latvians will be familiar with at least one of the names of the accused: that of Alexander Alexandrovich Nikonov, former secretary of the Latvian Communist Party Central Committee, now president of the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences and a prominent figure in the perestroika of agriculture.

Let us not exaggerate: most people in Latvia were not unduly bothered then by the replacement of a few dozen Party officials. It was the policies themselves that produced a lingering sickness in the popular consciousness, policies which have shown an increasingly crude disregard for the local people's interests. The most savage expression of this was the senseless banning of the feast of St Ivan, known in Latvia as *Ligo*. This popular national holiday had been observed for hundreds of years under numerous different governments. The only previous attempt to ban it was by German bishops and barons in the twelfth century, but they had rapidly reversed their decision, realizing it would be both pointless and dangerous. This shameful deed was repeated in the 1960s, and dealt perhaps the greatest blow of all to Communism in Latvia.

#### Occupation: Reality or Rhetoric?

Meanwhile a series of disastrous economic policies were imposed on the republic. Huge factories were built in areas which lacked raw materials, energy or manpower. These factories have been as unprofitable for Latvia as for the other republics, notably the RSFSR. They have syphoned off 'surplus' young people, thus depopulating the Russian countryside. They have poisoned the Latvian countryside. People are now advised not to swim at the popular seaside resorts of Yurmala, Daugava and Lielup on the gulf of Riga, and when children in kindergartens in Ventspils go swimming they are taught how to put on gas masks in case there is an accident at a factory which has been built in the very centre of the town.

Demographic problems have been further exacerbated by an artificially created influx of settlers. We constantly hear people in Moscow complaining about 'out-of-towners' who get self-contained

flats, while native Muscovites have to make do with shared ones. I invite these Muscovites to imagine for a moment that there are hundreds more of these 'out-of-towners' in the capital, all of them of a different ethnic group; that they are already the majority population there, and that Russian is heard less and less; that spokesmen have appeared amongst them who lay claim to these areas and even describe them as their own national property. This is how it is in Riga now.

With the advent of glasnost these problems have been publicly aired in Latvia, and have become the subject of noisy discussion. There are equally open discussions of the events of 1940, when the arrival of the Red Army forestalled elections to the national *Sejm*, or parliament. In these conditions, there was only one decent and honourable course for the Party to take: to open a proper debate on the problems of the past, the present and the future, to put people in the picture, to take the initiative in telling the truth. But the Party majority refused to do any such thing.

To take the simplest thing, a reassessment of the events of 1959. Over the last two years all the documents of this Central Committee plenum have been published, a commission has concluded its report, and a series of official statements have included a correct analysis of these depressing events, to which nobody has raised any objection. All that remains now is for this thirty-year-old blunder to be officially rescinded. Members of the Party minority—the future Independent Communist Party of Latvia—brought a prepared resolution on the subject to the Party's 25th Congress, and I could see nothing wrong with it. However, the majority refused to put the issue onto the agenda, and the Party newspaper *For the Motherland* observed contemptuously that the minority was trying to force a debate on the trifling question of 1959, and that the majority had quite correctly rejected their motion. What was correct about it, dear comrades? Why cannot people understand that a rash decision like this will do far more to undermine Latvians' faith in our alliance with the Soviet Union than any amount of anti-Soviet propaganda? It shows us more clearly than anything else that the Communist Party of Latvia does not intend to admit its mistakes, and that there is little reason to hope that things will ever be put right.

There can be little doubt that the 'independents' went to the 25th Congress with the intention of walking out. A statement containing their call for the Latvian Communist Party's independence from the Soviet Communist Party was published several months before and rejected outright by the Party majority. A month before the Congress, they held their own conference. They started well before the Congress to set up their own organizations (as did the majority). Be all that as it may, the majority did everything they could at the Congress to convince people that reconciliation was impossible, and that the minority had taken the only possible option available to it.

And not only at the Congress either. Let us take the problem of 1940. I do not accept the rhetoric about Soviet 'occupation' used by the

supporters of independence, or their claim that you can't repeal a decision that never legally existed. To be sure, the decisions to incorporate Latvia into the USSR, and the CPL into the Bolshevik Party, would not satisfy present-day legal standards. But must states and societies be defined totally and irrevocably by their origins? Does Latvia's fifty years within the Soviet Union really count for less than the few days it took it to join? If so, one might enquire into the origins of the government which was overthrown in 1940. Did not 72 per cent of the Latvian electorate, in those parts not occupied by the Germans, vote for the Bolsheviks in the 1917 elections to the Constituent Assembly? Did not the German army and the British fleet between them, during the post-1917 Civil War, destroy the first Soviet Republic of Latvia in 1919? And did not the invading armies of fourteen states force Soviet Russia in 1920 to sign the treaty of Riga, accepting Latvia's independent status?

There are many states and frontiers in the world today which have arisen with scant regard for the will of their people. If they were all to be carved up again on this basis, it would be difficult to know where to stop. I don't suppose there would have been any objection if members of the CPL majority had put arguments like these to the supporters of secession. But instead they continued to insist that the decision to join the USSR in 1940 was freely and democratically taken, and to describe the events in the Baltic regions that summer as a democratic revolution. Such arguments only make people realize that they are being treated as idiots. I confess that I am a Marxist, however unfashionable this may be at present, and I have always been taught that revolutionary situations arise under the influence of a complex series of social and political processes. How can it be seriously suggested, then, that a revolutionary situation had developed in the three different Baltic countries on one and the same day, and on the very day, moreover, when Soviet tanks appeared? It is a totally ludicrous idea, of course, and serious analysis shows that there was no revolutionary situation at all, although there was at that time a high level of discontent with the reactionary Baltic regimes.

But am I not also being treated as an idiot by those whose talk of 'occupation' stubbornly equates the events of half a century ago with those of the present? If there were an occupation regime in place to-day, even the mildest criticism would be forbidden. It is not only the people of Latvia who are misled by this rhetoric about 'occupation'. It is also deeply offensive to the other peoples of the Soviet Union, and only serves to endorse the opposing side's rhetoric—about 'nationalism', 'separatism' and 'anti-sovietism'. Who needs all this rhetoric, apart from those who actually manufacture it?

### Costs of Secession

Yet, despite the importance of the past, people have an even greater need to understand the future. Most of the discussions I have heard about Latvia's future in the event of secession from the USSR have been sheer speculation. The supporters of Soviet unity (that is, the PCL) frighten their opponents by producing bills for Soviet factories

and property that Latvia will have to pay if it secedes, and the supporters of independence respond by producing their own bills. It seems to me that serious negotiations between the two sides would show that most of these claims would cancel each other out—some small reparations might be required, but it is not yet clear from which side. At any rate, there is no point in threatening people in this way: it just won't work.

The advocates of Soviet unity warn that the USSR will retaliate by severing economic links. The advocates of Latvian independence reply that if secession is legally formulated, the USSR will do no such thing, since it has a direct interest in Latvian manufactured goods. This is quite reasonable, of course; the first scenario is not. What neither side will tell people, however, is that in the event of secession many economic links will indeed be severed, and many Latvian enterprises closed, not as a matter of deliberate policy by either side but due to inevitable real pressures. The commercial relationship between Latvia and the RSFSR and the other republics is such that for both sides to convert from Soviet wholesale prices to world prices, and from the dollar to the rouble, huge long-term losses will be imposed on the Baltic states, which at present import raw materials from the East, and export manufactured goods there. There is an enormous difference between paying thirty roubles and ninety dollars for a ton of oil.

Of course the Baltic republics will also demand to be paid world prices, in dollars, for their goods. But there is a hitch. The quality of oil does not depend on the labours of those who drill it: it is created by nature. And the quality of Soviet (and Baltic) machinery and equipment falls far short of the requirements of the world market. Siberia's oil could easily fetch the higher, world-market prices of the oil drilled at more central, recently discovered fields. If Latvia demands payment in dollars and at world prices for its electronics, Russian factories will say: I can buy Japanese goods for that price; if you don't let us have it cheaper, we won't take it.

People in Latvia know how to work, and if it is decided to leave the USSR they will of course eventually rebuild their economy. But at what cost? And will things really be better outside the Soviet Union than within it? I have not so far heard any convincing reply to this question. People refer to the transition taking two, five or even ten years. But what if it takes twenty? How many thousand people will lose their jobs in these years? And what will this unemployed generation's verdict be on their present leaders? None of these issues has been properly explored.

In a recent conversation, I learned of the kind of rapid financial benefits that it is hoped will result from independence. The man I spoke to listed the very real losses suffered by Latvia through the appalling bureaucratic mismanagement of its economy. If we eliminate the Soviet bureaucracy, the argument ran, we shall also eliminate wastage and grow rich. What my interlocutor omitted to say was that this would automatically happen if bureaucratic despotism was

eliminated within the USSR. Whereas independence would destroy the present sources not only of wastage, but of profits too. Everything would have to be created again from scratch, at considerable cost. 'There's nothing for it, people want independence, and we go along with them,' sighed one of the leaders of the Latvian Social Democratic movement once to me. 'But have you explained to them the probable economic consequences for them of this independence?' I enquired. 'No, we haven't', was the frank reply. Another man intervened heatedly: 'The people are prepared for any sacrifices!'

Is that so? Have the people of Latvia ever been asked exactly what sacrifices they are prepared to make, and why? Have they been asked how much unemployment they are prepared to tolerate, and for how long? My question about possible unemployment received the candid reply: 'We don't want to tell people about that, do we!'

I have dealt here only with Latvia's economic prospects outside the USSR; these are relatively clear to anyone seriously interested in finding out. But what about the political future facing the republic after secession takes place against the will of the Russian-speaking population? Will we see another Ulster, another Nagorno-Karabakh?

I would dearly like to know what my father would do if he was alive today. I don't imagine for a moment that he would join the majority CPL, which merely shouts the same slogans that were used so often to gag him. And what of the minority? Many of the people he respected have joined the ICPL. Yet he would never have supported secession from the USSR, however much he criticized Latvia's prospects within the Union. Nor would he have accepted the possibility of a new Communist Party based on ethnic division. And he would certainly be appalled to learn that the word 'internationalist' is no longer in fashion. I am sure that the present Communist Party of Latvia has no chance of becoming a vanguard political force until it learns to talk honestly, directly and respectfully to the native population of the republic. I am sure that the Independent Communist Party of Latvia has no chance of becoming a serious political force until it offers policies which attract the Russian-speaking population too. To date there has been no evidence of either.

*Translated by Cathy Porter*